MASSILLON.

MASSILLON'S SERMONS

FOR ALL THE

SUNDAYS AND FESTIVALS

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

Translated from the French,

BY THE REV. EDWARD PEACH.

"Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."—LUKE, xi, 28.

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DUBLIN;
Printed by James Moore,
2, CRAMPTON-QUAY.

PREFACE.

It is a subject of general astonishment and regret, that the English Catholic has never been presented with a translation of the sermons of Massillon. The applause with which they were received on the Continent is the most unequivocal proof of their merit. His sermons for Lent were preached, with unparalleled and undiminished success, twenty years successively, before a most voluptuous court, and before one of the most polished audiences in the Christian world; and the whole of his works have been, from the time of their publication, the delight and admiration of the pious and well-informed in every country where the French language is understood. This is the greatest commendation which can be adduced in favour of works of this kind. An inferior preacher may sometimes attract attention; and unless his merit be eclipsed by the lustre of superior genius, may maintain his reputation for a time, and receive the flattering applause of the public; but the power of extorting the admiration and riveting the attention of the most voluptuous, the most irreligious, the most fickle votaries of pleasure, is a talent possessed by few: and to be held up as a model of spiritual eloquence, even after death, by men of all nations and religions, is an honour which is attained only by extra-

ordinary merit. This distinguished preëminence was due to the talents of Massillon, and is acknowledged as candidly bythe learned Protestant as by the Catholic.

Never, perhaps, was there a Christian orator who possessed a more perfect knowledge of the heart of man. He insinuates himself into its inmost recesses: he explores and lays open every avenue to public inspection. He delineates the affections, describes the first causes of the corruption, and displays the inward workings of the mind, with such precision and clearness, that every individual who has departed from the ways of virtue beholds as exact a delineation of his own features, as if the picture had been designed for him alone.

In the arrangement of his discourses, Massillon attends more to sentiments than words. He prepares his audience for hearing plain truths by a short exposition of his subject; and, instead of demonstrating the existence of the law, or the necessity of implicitly submitting to its injunctions, of which he supposes that his auditory is already convinced, he immediately proceeds to combat the pretexts which the violators of it allege in justification of their conduct.

The style of Massillon is animated, chaste, and flowing; and, although dignified and worthy of the Christian pulpit, it is simple and adapted to the understanding of the unlearned. The liveliness of his imagination adorns it sufficiently to please the man of taste and education: but he rejects those decorations which contribute only to throw a veil over the subject, and to raise it above the comprehension of the multitude. He studies not to please the ear, but to convey instruction,

and reform the profligate. He admits only the grand and sublime conceptions which elevate the soul, and fix her attention immovably on the important truths which he announces.

Every sentiment is illustrated and enforced by the authority of the Scriptures. The similitudes and the quotations which he adduces from the inspired writings are never sought after, they always rise from the subject, and immediately strike, sometimes by the novelty, and always by the justness of their application.

An orator of such distinguished talents, eloquence, and piety, could not fail of success. It is, therefore, unnecessary to add, that his audience was always absorbed in attention, that the just were comforted, the tepid undeceived, and the wicked confounded. When he delivered his sermon *on the small number of the Elect* before the voluptuous court of Versailles, the powers of his eloquence were manifested in the most extraordinary manner. So complete was the imagination of this august assembly affected by his awful description, that, at length, terrified and struck as it were by an electric shock, they started involuntarily from their seats, and by their loud and continued murmurs of astonishment and applause, obliged him for a time to desist: he however was not abashed, but concluded his discourse in the most pathetic and masterly manner. A more wonderful instance of the effects of oratory perhaps is not recorded in history. The fruits which always accompanied his ministry were great and lasting. After the conclusion of a discourse, the people did not form themselves into parties in order to canvass its merits and defects; but they all retired in silence, with pensive

looks, downcast eyes, and sorrowful countenances. They thought not of the preacher: their attention was immovably fixed on the great and sublime truths which he had delivered. These silent commendations, if they may be so called, are more expressive of the merits of an orator, than any public applause. The one only flatters the speaker, and assures him that he has pleased his auditory; the other imparts the sweetest consolation to his mind, and assures him that he has touched the heart. "I have heard many distinguished orators," said Louis XIV, addressing himself to Massillon, when he preached his first Advent before the Court, in the year 1702, "I have heard many distinguished orators in my chapel, who gave me very great satisfaction; but when I hear you, I am dissatisfied with myself."

Respecting the doctrine of Massillon, I fear that its severity will be criticised and reproved; for he preaches the gospel in its genuine purity. Like another Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he announces the precepts of the Lord without fear, and without disguise. He knows that the laws of the gospel are unalterable, and that every letter must be fulfilled in the last age of Christianity, as well as in the first. He refuses to make any composition with the tepid and slothful degeneracy of the times; because, in the first place, he had received no authority for that purpose; and secondly, because the mercies of the Lord were extended to their utmost limits when he consented to receive us into favour on the fulfilment of the conditions contained in the Scriptures. He is therefore severe: but he is severe because the gospel is severe, because his duty compelled him to be severe.

In the exercise, however, of his painful ministry, he is actuated by that charity, which seeks not only the instruction, but the salvation of men. He displays the most rigid precepts of the gospel in the most engaging colours; and he exposes the follies and pleasures of the world in a light that is calculated to create aversion and disgust. He exhibits the just man adorned with honour and glory, and happy in the sweet enjoyments of peace and innocence: and he represents the sinner covered with ignominy and shame, and tortured with the never-dying worm of anxiety and remorse. Under his pencil the character of the just man assumes a new and surprising lustre. He comes forth in all his native greatness, the champion of truth and justice, the brave and valiant soldier of Jesus Christ, patiently enduring the fatigues of the Christian warfare, encountering with joy every obstacle that opposes him, and finally subduing all the enemies of his soul—the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The sinner, on the other hand, appears in the attitude and dress of a listless ignominious coward, whose only delight is sensual pleasure, whose courage fails at the first call to arms, and who shrinks with terror when he is summoned to quit the bed of ease, and encounter the enemies of his salvation. The features of the true Christian appear dignified and composed, and the enjoyments which give pleasure to his manly soul, rational, noble, and sublime: the features of the sinner, on the other hand, appear relaxed by luxury, and distorted by solicitude and fear, and the pleasures which excite the longings of his ignoble soul, disgusting, momentary, unworthy of a rational being, and productive of misery both in this world and

the next. In this manner the pious and eloquent Massillon softens and decks with charms the severities of God's law. He compels the sinner to acknowledge the folly and madness of a sinful life: he instils into his mind a hatred and disgust of the cruel tyrant under whose despotism he has languished so long: he convinces him that sin is the fatal enemy of his peace, and he describes in such plain and energetic terms his blindness, ingratitude, and misery, that he is in a manner constrained to throw himself into the arms of piety, as the only means of asserting the dignity of his nature, and of acquiring peace and happiness, as well here as hereafter.

The English Catholic has reason to regret that the works of this celebrated ornament of the pulpit have been so long concealed from him. A regular and well executed translation would be a valuable addition to the libraries of the learned, and would undoubtedly meet with encouragement from the enlightened and wealthy part of the community. But the difficulties of the undertaking, the price which would be required for the purchase of so large a work, and the certainty that the immoderate length of the sermons, and their being chiefly confined to Lent and Advent, would operate against the constant perusal of them by the great body of the people, are reasons which, I apprehend, will deter every man of abilities equal to the task from attempting the execution. In order, however, that some benefit may be derived from this treasure of sacred eloquence, the present work is respectfully offered to the public. It cannot be properly called a translation. It is a collection of pious and enlightened

discourses, drawn up after the manner to which the English reader is habituated, and appropriated to the Sundays and Festivals of the year.

The substance is taken from Massillon, with the exception sometimes of part, and sometimes of the whole of the introduction and conclusion; instructions to the lower classes are sometimes substituted in the place of the numerous addresses to the court, which abound in the original; and occasional hints at the times, and the situation of the country are inserted. Sometimes two discourses are formed out of one; at other times, one part only is taken; and at others the whole is abridged. At all times, the division, the arrangement, the subject (with the exceptions mentioned above) are Massillon's; and his method is followed as closely as the nature of the work would permit.

It is not presumed that a circumscribed selection like this will be worthy of the reputation of Massillon: it could not be expected: it was not hoped for. The passionate admirers of eloquence, who prefer the nice arrangement of words and sentences before objects of higher importance, may perhaps be dissatisfied with this imperfect display of the abilities of this celebrated preacher, and exclaim against the hand that has dared to violate the integrity of such wonderful specimens of oratory: but the sincere lovers of piety, it is presumed, will applaud the attempt, notwithstanding the imperfect manner in which it is executed; and above all, a pleasing hope is entertained that it will meet with the approbation of Him, whose honour and glory alone it was intended to promote.

Birmingham, July 11, 1807.

SERMONS

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY AND FESTIVAL OF THE YEAR.

I.—FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE LAST DAY.

"And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud in great power and majesty."—*Luke*, xxi, 27.

Thus, my beloved friends, shall the revolutions and kingdoms of this world be brought to a conclusion for ever. Thus shall end all the earthly pursuits which either amused us by their novelty, or seduced us by their charms. Thus shall the Son of Man come. Thus shall be ushered in the great day of his manifestation, the beginning of his reign, the complete redemption of his mystical body. On this day the consciences of all mankind shall be exposed to view—a day of calamity and despair to the sinner, but of peace, joy, and consolation to the just. On this day the eternal lot of the whole world shall be decided.

The constant recollection of these great truths animated the primitive Christian with patience in persecution, and inspired him with joy in the midst of sufferings and contempt. It was this that supported the courage of the martyrs, invigorated the constancy of virgins, and rendered sweet and agreeable to the recluse the dreary paths of solitude and retirement. You yourselves, perhaps, have sometimes felt sentiments of compunction and fear, on the recollection of what will come to pass on this day. But these sentiments were probably of short continuance: thoughts of a more cheerful nature soon effaced them from your mind, and restored you to your former tranquillity.

In the first ages it would have been deemed a kind of apostacy not to have sighed after the day of the Lord. The thought of this great event was a subject of consolation to

these primitive disciples: the apostles were obliged to moderate the eager desires which they expressed for its arrival. But in these times the Church is obliged to call forth all the powers of her ministry to impress the thought of this awful day on the minds of the faithful; not indeed with the expectation of exciting within them the same holy and devout impatience for its speedy accomplishment—that, I apprehend, is no longer possible,—but with the hopes of awakening them to repentance by the fear and consternation which all must feel who are sensible of the alternative that awaits them in the winding up of these general accounts, in the last trying scene of this awful and terrible catastrophe.

It is not my intention in this discourse to display the external terrors of this great day; I mean the confusion of the elements, the irregular motions of the heavenly bodies, the universal destruction of nature, and men withering away through fear. I shall confine myself to a subject more adapted to make a salutary impression on the minds of my audience. I shall confine myself solely to the consideration of what will naturally present itself to view on the opening of the book of conscience, when the secrets of all men's hearts shall be revealed.

Man, during his abode in this world, knows not his own heart. Self-love spreads a veil over his imperfections, and conceals the knowledge of his true state, both from himself and from others. But on this day he shall be seen in his true dress, both by himself and by all mankind. The just man is disregarded and despised in this world: he is subjected in a great measure to the will of the sinner; his life is esteemed folly, and his end without honour. He, likewise, shall be seen in his true light on this day, and shall be honoured before the whole world with that honour to which his merits are entitled. I purpose, therefore, to make a few reflections on the confusion which shall seize the wicked, when the secrets of their hearts shall be revealed; and on the glory and honour which the just shall receive, when their secret virtues and good works shall be fully manifested.

1. It would be presumption to pretend to describe in appropriate terms the qualities of the Great Judge, who shall preside on that awful day. He is a severe lawgiver, who is jealous of the sanctity of his laws, and who will judge you by them alone. All extenuations, all favourable interpretations, which custom or worldly wisdom have introduced, will then disappear; and the advantages, which the sinner appeared to derive from them, will end in nothing. He is a Judge, highly interested in the glory of his Father against the sinner;

and on this day he will display his zeal for the honour of the Divinity, against those who have refused him the just tribute of adoration and glory. He is a Saviour, whose sacred wounds will severely rebuke you for your ingratitude, and whose blood will raise its voice, and loudly demand your condemnation. He is the searcher of hearts, to whose eyes every thing is open, even the most secret thoughts. In a word, he is a God of power and majesty, before whom the heavens will pass away, the elements be dissolved, all nature be in confusion, and obliged to sustain the terrors of his presence, and the rigour of his examination.

The particulars of this dreadful examination will, in the first place, be the same for all. Difference of times, of ages, of countries, of birth, and disposition, will be totally disregarded; and as the gospel, by which you will be judged, is the same for all ages and states, and proposes the same rules of conduct to the strong and to the weak, to the king and to the subject, to the hermit and to the worlding, to the primitive Christian and to the Christian of the present times, there will be no distinction in the mode of examination. No attention will be paid to excuses of rank, of birth, of the dangers of particular states, of the customs of the world, of weakness of constitution: but the same rigorous account of chastity, of humility, of modesty, of constant vigilance, of forgiveness of injuries, of self-denial, of mortification, and of all other Christian virtues, will be exacted from the poor and from the rich, from the prince and from the people, from the learned and the unlearned, from the primitive and from the modern Christian.

In the second place, this examination will be universal; that is, it will include every circumstance of your lives. It will include the failings of your younger years, which probably have long since escaped your memory—the indiscretions of youth, almost every hour of which was perhaps stained with crimes—the desires and cares of more advanced years—the peevishness and insensibility of old age. With what surprise will the sinner perceive, when the different stages of his life are thus passed in review before his eyes, that through the whole course he was profane, dissolute, sensual, without piety, without repentance, without good works; that he busied himself in the different situations of life, to no other purpose than to heap up to himself a more abundant treasure of wrath; and that he lived as if all were to have ended with his mortal existence.

In this life we never behold the true state of our interior; our attention is engaged by the few serious sentiments with

which we are occasionally animated; and the judgment which we form of ourselves is generally influenced by the last impressions which are made upon our minds. A few thoughts of salvation, with which God inspires us from time to time; a day, for instance, spent in the exercises of piety, causes us to forget many years spent in the pursuits of vice; and the declaration of our crimes at the tribunal of penance, blots them out from our remembrance, and restores us to as perfect a state of tranquillity, as if we had never committed them. But before this terrible Judge all will appear at once: our whole lives will be exposed to view. Every motion of our hearts, from the first development of reason to the last moment of existence, will be manifested; the long catalogue of crimes, committed during the different stages of life, will be all collected together: not an action, not a desire, not a thought, not a word will be omitted; for if the hairs of our head are numbered, with greater reason are our works. Then shall you see the true state of your souls: then shall their secret avenues, their hidden affections, their depraved appetites, be all laid open to your view: then shall their unlawful desires, their hatreds and animosities, their vitiated and impure intentions, their criminal projects, which were overlooked because they proved abortive, and all their other vices, be displayed before you. "Oh!" says St. Bernard, "crimes without number will burst suddenly upon the sight, as from a secret hiding place, of which we never thought that we were guilty." "Quasi ex improviso, et quasi ex insidiis."—*St. Ber.* We shall see what we never saw before—we shall see our true selves: the dark abyss shall be enlightened, and the mystery of iniquity shall be revealed. After the scrutiny into our transgressions is concluded the Judge will enter into a strict examination of the good works which we ought to have performed, but have neglected. Here again we shall find that our whole lives have been chequered with sins of omission, of which we never thought of repenting: so many opportunities, for instance, which, through complaisance, through fear of offending, through interest, or other motives, we suffered to escape in silence, when our character required that we should have vindicated the honour of God, and the cause of virtue and truth: so many occasions of promoting the spiritual welfare of our neighbour, by example or by other means, which we have neglected; so many favourable moments suffered to pass by through indolence or indifference, when we might have prevented crimes in others by seasonable advice, and by prudent remonstrances: so many days, so many moments wasted away in idleness and sloth,

which might have been devoted, without any inconvenience, to the great affair of salvation. Ah! my beloved, this was the time which we called the most innocent period of our lives:—a time, which, if it was not distinguished by any good works, we considered, at least, as totally void of evil. With what regret will the sinner look back on that length of days which he sacrificed to trifles, and to a world that is no more, when he reflects that, had he consecrated them to the service of God, he might have merited Heaven! With what confusion will he recollect the humiliations, the labours and crosses to which he submitted for the acquisition of wealth, of a fortune which he could possess only for an instant, when he is convinced that one half, or even a quarter of the same trials, endured for the sake of Christ, would have placed him for ever at rest in the secure enjoyment of God's eternal kingdom.

After this, we shall be called to account for all the graces which we have abused; for the many calls and inspirations which we have neglected; for the little profit which we reaped from the powerful exhortations of his ministers; for the improper use which we made of the sufferings and afflictions with which he was pleased to visit us for our improvement in good; for the many gifts of nature, which ought to have been devoted to the works of piety, but which we made the instruments of vice. Ah! if the unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness, because he merely buried his talent, what favour can they expect, who have received so many talents, and have employed them all against the Giver?

The account, which we shall here be called upon to give, will be terrible in the extreme. Christ will demand back again at our hands the price of his blood. We are sometimes inclined to complain, that God has not done enough for us; that we are naturally inclined to evil; that we cannot soften down the harshness of our temper and disposition; and that he has not given us sufficient grace to resist the occasions of sin to which we are exposed. But at the last day, we shall clearly perceive that our whole lives were one continued abuse of his favours and graces; we shall see that, preferably to so many nations, whom he has left in the darkness of infidelity, we were favoured with the light of faith, fed with his holy word and with his sacraments, and supported by his inspirations and graces. Yes: you will be astonished to see how much God has done for you, and how little you have done for him. Your complaints will be turned into confusion, which will terminate in despair.

Hitherto, beloved Christians, the examination has extended

to those sins only which the sinner has committed in his own person. But when the Sovereign Judge shall proceed to investigate the sins which we have occasioned in others, what an immense multitude will be again presented to our view! We shall behold, assembled before our eyes, all the souls to whom we have been the occasion of sin; all the souls who have, either by our example, by our solicitations or impurities, been seduced from the paths of virtue, and condemned to Hell; all the souls, whose faith we have shaken, whose piety we have weakened, whose libertinism we have encouraged. Yes: our Lord Jesus, to whom they belonged, and who had bought them with his precious blood, will require them at our hands as his inheritance—as a conquest which we have wrested from him—as his children, whom we have murdered. Ah! if he marked Cain with the seal of reprobation on account of the blood of his brother, with what seal will he mark the sinner, when he shall demand an account of the souls whom he has murdered, and consigned to the second and eternal death?

In this manner will our whole souls be exposed to view.

Happy, exclaims St. Augustin, should we be, if we could open our eyes, and behold the state of our interior as clearly now as we shall behold it then. Truly, my beloved, could we divest ourselves of those prejudices which cloud our sight, could we resist the influence of those examples, which encourage us in our delusions,—could we be convinced of the falsity of those maxims and customs, which tranquillize our consciences,—could we measure by the standard of truth, the faculties and talents on which we pride ourselves,—could we renounce that self-love, which is the root of all our evils,—and could we, by these means, see ourselves in the same light in which we are seen of God, what a holy hatred should we conceive against ourselves! How strenuously should we endeavour to humble ourselves in his sight, during the days of our mortality, in hopes of avoiding the humiliations of that day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and made manifest to the whole world.

2. Let us, however, turn to a more cheerful subject, and describe the examination of that happy few, of which we all hope to form a part.

Two things, which, according to appearances, are inconsistent with the idea of infinite justice, may be said to be unavoidable in the indiscriminate society of the good and the bad. First, concealed crimes escape the public censure which they deserve, and hidden virtue is deprived of the applause to which it is entitled. Secondly,—The sinner is

oftentimes raised to honours and dignities, whilst the just man is obliged to tread the lowly paths of subjection and submission to his orders. On this great day, these evils shall be fully rectified. The sinner shall be separated from the just, as soon as the book of conscience is displayed; and the honours and the dignities of the Heavenly Jerusalem shall be conferred on the deserving—the true and faithful servants of the Lord.

What a consolation will it be to the just, to have the secrets of their hearts finally revealed! Their perfections were concealed from men in this world. They were known to God alone. They were unknown even to themselves; for humility had concealed from their view the beauty and innocence of their interior, and had displayed before their eyes only the few blemishes and imperfections to which human nature is unavoidably exposed. But now the veil shall be withdrawn, and their secret storehouse of merits shall be thrown open to the inspection of all. With what astonishment will the great assembly of the sons of men behold the triumphs of these humble servants of God! their hitherto concealed victories over the world, the flesh, and the Devil—their heroic sacrifices—their fervent desires—their tender sighs—their transports of love—their faith—their humility—their magnanimity—their greatness of soul—their perfect contempt for all those false and fleeting vanities on which the hopes and desires of worldlings are so constantly fixed. Then shall it be seen and acknowledged, that nothing created has so just a title to praise and admiration, as the just man. Then shall it be seen and acknowledged, that the interior exploits of the true Christian are more sublime, and more noble, than all the great transactions of the world; that they alone are worthy to be recorded in the book of life; and that in the estimation of God himself, they exhibit a spectacle more worthy of the admiration of angels and men, than all the boasted victories and conquests which swell the pages of history; the memory of which has been immortalized by pompous monuments, but which shall now be considered as the effects of a puerile and barbarous ambition, and as the horrid fruits of pride and vain glory. Thus, the evil complained of in the first instance, will be entirely removed, and things will be restored to their proper order. The guilty will not triumph—will not escape the general opprobrium, nor the punishment which is due to their crimes: and an ample recompense will be given to the just man, in the clear and distinct view of an astonished and admiring universe.

The second evil is the prosperity of the wicked, and the

adversity of the good. The just man, as if of no more account than the dust from which he sprang, and as if resembling the basest metals passing in the progress to refinement through the fiery ordeal of tribulation, is, not unfrequently, the lowest and the most contemptible of his species; whilst the sinner is exalted like the cedar of Lebanon, and surrounded by all that riches and honour can procure. This, in appearance, is contrary to order and justice. But, although by this means the just are purified, and the wicked hardened; although this confused mixture of good and evil enters into the designs of Providence, and the just and unjust are hastened to their destination by ways which are inscrutable to man: nevertheless, it is necessary that the Son of God should rectify all things; that he should publicly manifest the distinction which exists between good and evil, between the man who serves the Lord, and the man who denies him. This will be effected on the great day of the Lord: order will be perfectly established: the good will be separated from the wicked: these will be placed on the right hand, and the others on the left.

Then shall the Son of Man, from his exalted throne in the clouds of Heaven, cast his eyes over the immense multitude of peoples and nations assembled before him. Then shall he collect his chosen people from the four corners of the earth: then shall he unite together the true children of Israel: then shall he introduce to notice, and celebrate the exploits of heroes of religion, hitherto unknown to the world. The different epochs, or stated periods of time, he will distinguish, not by the victories of warriors, not by the rise or fall of empires, but by the particular triumphs of his grace, by the victories of the just man over his passions, by the establishment of his reign in the heart, by the invincible constancy of a persecuted disciple. He will entirely change the order of things: he will create a new Heaven and a new earth: he will reduce this infinite variety of peoples, of nations, of titles, dignities and states, to two different orders or descriptions of men—to the elect of God, and to the reprobate. The one shall be placed on his right hand, the other on the left.

What a terrible separation, my beloved brethren, will then take place! Father will be separated from son, brother from brother, friend from friend: one shall be taken, the other left. Death, which separates us for a time from the dearest objects of our affections, has thus much, at least, of consolation in it, that hereafter, perhaps, we may be united again. But here, the separation which divides us will be eternal: as far as the east is from the west, or Heaven from

Hell, so far will the just be removed from the reprobate for ever.

All things being thus finally arranged; all mankind thus divided; each one immovable in the place allotted to him; confusion, dismay, terror, and despair, shall be visible on the countenance of the one; and joy, serenity, and confidence, shall enliven the other: the eyes of the just shall be fixed on the Son of Man, their great and good deliverer; the eyes of the wicked shall be cast on the earth, penetrating into that dreadful abyss, which in a short moment is to open, and swallow them up for eternity. Then will the King of Glory, says the gospel, place himself between the two assemblies, and turning to the just on the right, with looks of clemency and love—looks, which alone would repay them for all their past afflictions, he will say to them: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—*Matt.*, xxv, 34. Whilst you lived on earth, you were treated by worldly men as fools, as the outcasts of society, and as useless members of the state; but they shall this day be convinced that the world subsisted only for you; that the world was made only for you; and that, as soon as your number was complete, the final dissolution took place. Come, then, my beloved, quit this earth, where you were always strangers and pilgrims; follow me in the paths of glory and happiness, as you followed me in those of humiliations and sufferings. Your afflictions were momentary, but the reward which awaits you shall be eternal. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Then turning to the wicked on the left, with eyes flashing with indignation, and with a countenance replete with terrors, with a voice, says the prophet, that shall open the bowels of the abyss, (*Num.* xvi.) he will say, not as on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."—*Luke*, xxiii. 34; but, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the Devil and his angels." *Matt.*, xxv, 41. You were once the chosen people of my Father, but you are now the accursed: the enjoyments which you preferred before me were false and momentary, but your punishment shall be eternal. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Then the just, triumphantly ascending into the clouds with the Son of Man, will sing to their deliverer: "Thou art just, O Lord, and rich in mercy: thou hast crowned all thy blessings by the recompense which thou now bestowest on our merits." Then the wicked will curse the Author of their existence, and the day on

which they were born; or rather, they will turn their rage against themselves, as the sole authors of their damnation. Then shall the abyss be opened, and the heavens shall stoop down; the reprobate shall go into eternal torments, and the elect into life everlasting. Afterwards, there will be no further communication between them. The sentence which divides them is irrevocable: and they separate for ever.

After such a description, calculated to make an impression on the most hardened, I cannot better conclude than by addressing to you the words, which Moses addressed to the Israelites, after he had represented to them the dreadful threats and the consoling promises which were written in the book of the law: "Children of Israel," says he, "I this day propose to your choice a blessing or a curse; a blessing, if you fulfil the precept of the Lord your God: a curse, if you forsake his ways, which I have pointed out to you, in order to follow strange gods."—*Deut.*, xi. 26. The same do I address to you: it is in your power to choose which of the two you will embrace: you have heard the promises and the threats: the blessing, and the curse. You must take part either with the devil and his angels, or with Christ and his elect: there is no alternative here. I have shown you the way which leads to heaven, and that which leads to hell. In which of the two will you walk? What would be your eternal lot, if this instant you were summoned to appear before your Judge? Be on your guard: man dies as he lives. Dread, therefore, lest death should surprise you in the state of sin. Forsake the ways of the wicked, and live the life of the just, if you hope to be placed with them on the right, and to accompany them into the regions of a blissful immortality.

II.—SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE CONDITIONS AND CONSOLATIONS OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

"This is he, of whom it is written; 'Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee."—*Matt.*, xi. 10.

During the sacred time of Advent, the Church invites us, in the most pressing terms, to prepare our souls for the approaching solemnity of the birth of Christ. This is the time, she exclaims, to arise from sleep, because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed: this is the time to do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. She assumes

the office of the precursor; she goes before the face of the Lord, and by the voice of her ministers, solicits us to open our hearts to receive him at this holy time, in order that his arms may be opened hereafter to receive us on the great day of final retribution.

But, beloved Christians, are we prepared to accept these gracious invitations? Are we eager to rush forward to the banks of the Jordan, confessing our sins? Ah! we all listen to the heavenly monitor, but we obey him not. We are more inclined to flatter ourselves with the supposition that we are as perfect as the law of God requires us to be; that we fulfil all the divine commandments with sufficient exactitude; that we comply with our duties, and that we perform every good work which our state of life obliges us to perform: we are more inclined, I say, to form this favourable opinion of ourselves, than to suppose that the words of the Baptist are addressed to us: "Ye vipers, who hath taught you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth worthy fruits of penance."—*Matt.*, iii, 7.

But, my beloved, in vain do we endeavour to deceive ourselves. Truth itself, and the testimony of our own conscience declare that we are sinners, and consequently, that it is our bounden and indispensable duty to reform, and to do penance. None have escaped the general prevarication; and therefore none are exempt from the general precept: "Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand."—*Matt.*, iii, 2.

In calling your attention to this subject, I do not mean to enter into any argument on the necessity of repentance—that is a settled point—that is undeniable. My object is to lay before you the conditions which must accompany your repentance, in order that it may find acceptance with God; and in conclusion, to add a few reflections on the interior delights which smoothen the rugged paths of self-denial and reformation.

1. Sin is an alienation of the affections from God, and an attempt to extract happiness from the enjoyment of created things, in opposition to the will of the Creator. The first duty, therefore, of repentance, is to renounce these vain objects of attachment, and to replace our affections on him, who alone is worthy of them. To this we are urged, not only by the voice of religion, but by the united voice of reason and experience. Reason informs us, that that object alone is worthy of our love which can effectually contribute to our happiness; which can satisfy the cravings of our souls; which can administer to our wants, alleviate our afflictions,

and procure us all good. Now, God alone being the author of these inestimable blessings, reason dictates the necessity of fixing our affections solely on him. Experience has already convinced us of this truth. During the time that our affections were fixed on earthly things, we always felt a deficiency in our breasts: we perceived that creatures were capricious, false, and inconstant: we saw that our hearts were deluded, and that happiness was not to be found in them.

With the authority, therefore, of religion, reason, and experience on my side, I will boldly proclaim the necessity of fixing your affections, in the very commencement of your repentance, solely on the Great Author of your existence, and on the Giver of every good gift: I will confidently assert that you will not persevere in your great work, unless you open your hearts to the same seraphic flames of love which animated the saints, and endeavour to walk in their footsteps. They are your models, and after them must you form the plan of your new life.

But methinks I hear you say, that if such perfect love be a necessary ingredient of repentance, it is in vain for you to attempt it; and to require that you walk in the footsteps of the saints, is to require impossibilities. But, my beloved friends, why are you alarmed? Who, and what were the saints? Do you suppose that they were beings of a superior order? or that they possessed qualities which were never implanted in your nature? Far from it. They were men in the pursuit of the same happiness as yourselves. They differed in nothing from you, except in fixing on the proper object for their pursuit. And will you say that you are not susceptible of the same sublime impressions of holy love as they were? You can adhere to creatures with the most ardent warmth of passion; and are you incapable of adhering to the Great Author of all with the same degree of warmth and animation? If this be true, what are we to infer? That you were made for vanity and folly: that your hearts are so mean and grovelling, that they cannot rise to the love or fruition of any thing beyond the enjoyment of sensual pleasures? Ah! for God's sake, let not anything like this be said of you! Oh! do not, do not you subscribe to this assertion! For, if you are not formed for divine love, what is the object of your existence, and for whom were you made? Will you allow, that you were created for no other purpose than to be the victims of melancholy and delusion? Will you allow, that the Great Author of your existence has drawn you out of nothing, merely to make you miserable? and that your souls are capacitated to enjoy no other happi-

ness than that which eludes your search, than that which, in reality, has no existence?

O man, be no longer the dupe of your own fears. The fervour of the saints is not difficult of imitation. Open your eyes: look into your interior; and you will discover that the dispositions, which you consider as obstacles to divine love, are the very dispositions which will promote its reign in your souls. The more ardent you now are in the pursuit of worldly vanities, the more ardent will you be hereafter in the service of God, and in the pursuit of eternal pleasures. The more your heart is susceptible of the love of creatures, the easier access will it open to the inspirations of divine grace. The more haughty, proud, and ambitious you are by nature, the more independently will you serve the Lord without fear, without human respect, without adulation. The more pliant, volatile, and inconstant your disposition, the more easy will it be for you to withdraw your misplaced affections, and fix them on God. In a word, your passions themselves, may be made, in a great measure, the ground-work of your repentance. You may make that, which has hitherto being the cause of your sins, the instrument of your salvation; and you will thus experience, that the heart, which is susceptible of impressions from creatures, is more susceptible of the impressions of divine grace.

2. The first condition, therefore, of true repentance, which is *the love of God*, is necessary, and within your power. The second, which is equally necessary, and which consists in *works of self-denial and mortification*, may be easily practised by the influence which the former will necessarily have over every part of your future conduct.

During the time that you were engaged in sin, you lived in the constant abuse of the gifts of God. Reparation, consequently, must be made to divine justice by the mortification of the senses, and the voluntary renunciation of those enjoyments, of which you have made an improper use.

Strictly speaking, the sinner may be said to have lost his right to the blessings of God: he has forfeited his inheritance: he has incurred the malediction of his Creator: he is an anathema in the midst of all the creatures which God had intended for his use. There are, therefore, ordinances for the unfaithful, which are not extended to mankind in general. They are excepted from the common right: and they are to judge of the extent of their liberties, not from general maxims, but from the personal exceptions which they have incurred.

On this principle, I will answer a question which is fre-

quently brought forward by false penitents: "Is it unlawful," they ask, "to indulge the fancies of dress, on purpose to engage the attention of others? Is this or that public amusement, is this or that innocent enjoyment, forbidden by the gospel?" I will reply by another question:—Have you never criminally abused these liberties? Have you never made them the occasions of sin? Ah! by means of these very amusements, you have probably heaped up to yourselves treasures of wrath: and now, that you are deliberating on the means of effecting a change of life, you stand up in defence of vanity and folly: now that you are entering on a course of atonement to the divine justice for the numberless offences of your past lives, when sackcloth and ashes ought to be your only ornament, you maintain the lawfulness of pomp and splendour, and dissipation, from which, whether they are allowable in others or not, you certainly ought, in every view of the case, on principles of conscience and right reason, carefully to restrict yourselves.

Beloved Christians, the sorrows of true repentance hurry away the soul with precipitation from every thing which has at any time been to her an occasion of sin. She considers not whether *this*, or *that*, be innocent in itself, but whether it has led, or is calculated to lead her into the deep abyss of sin. She entertains as great an abhorrence for the promoters of her crimes as for the crimes themselves. She avoids the sparks which enkindled her passions, with as much care as she resists the passions themselves. She trembles at the idea of her former irregularities. She abhors the sight of the places, persons, and things which gave occasion to them: she flies from them with haste, lest they should again make an impression on her heart. Instead, therefore, of maintaining the lawfulness of again corresponding with the objects and occasions of your former sins, you must hate, you must fly from them as from a pestilence. You must shun the rocks, on which you have already suffered shipwreck. Necessity compels you: for, be assured, if you continue to love the danger, you will infallibly perish in it.

Moreover, in the same manner as concupiscence embraces every opportunity of indulging its unlawful propensities, so, likewise, the true penitent endeavours on every occasion to satisfy the divine justice by private mortifications. He sacrifices on the altar of penance every thing that flatters the senses, every thing that cherishes the passions, and every superfluity that tends only to strengthen the empire of self-love. Like a two-edged sword, he reaches unto the division of the soul and the spirit: he makes separations the most

painful to flesh and blood; he cuts even to the quick, and retrenches every thing that favours the inclinations of corrupt nature: he is ingenious in his modes of penance. In every occurrence of life he discovers means of contributing to the expiation of his former sins: even the few amusements which he allows himself, he changes into acts of virtue, hy the pious circumspection with which he indulges them.

This, beloved Christians, is the Heavenly secret of repentance. Now let me exhort you to compare your system of a penitent life, with the model which I have displayed. Do not deceive yourselves. It is in vain that you have put off the defiled garments of grosser sensualities, unless you renounce likewise the love of pomp and vanity,—unless you have resolution to mortify your will, and repress the insatiable desires of self-love. Ah! seldom is there a true penitent! Imperfect and superficial conversions are frequent; but there is too much reason to fear that the greater number of those, who appear reformed in the eyes of the world, will carry with them to the great tribunal of God, hearts as much attached to vanity, and as corrupt in their affections, as they were in the midst of their irregularities.

In order to settle your reform of life on the most solid basis, you must apply diligently to the practice of the opposite virtues. If you have been addicted to gaming, vanity, or love of dress, your dissipated state of mind must be reformed by prayer, retirement, and works of mercy. If you have strengthened the empire of flesh and blood, by abandoning yourselves to the more disgraceful passions, the flames of impurity and intemperance must be extinguished by degrees by fasts, austerities, watchings, and the heavy yoke of self-denial and penance. This is not a matter of counsel; it is of precept. Your happiness depends upon it, your perseverance depends upon it; for your old attachments will incessantly shoot forth, and spring up again, if they be not entirely eradicated from your breasts. Your passions will become more violent, and will redouble their attacks, unless they are completely subdued. You will be in momentary danger of another shipwreck. You will enjoy neither peace nor consolation in your new life. Your weakness and pusillanimity will increase. The pleasures which you have renounced will appear before your eyes in the most engaging colours, and the charms of piety and holiness will appear faded and uninviting. Thus will you be a constant temptation to yourselves; and, as it is not easy to maintain a contest against yourselves for any length of time, you will soon turn away

with disgust from a life which costs you so dear. It is true, therefore, my dear friends, and let me entreat you to reflect seriously on what I am about to say: it is true, that in proportion as you increase and multiply your sacrifices on the first commencement of a reform of life, you diminish the difficulties; and that, in proportion as you favour your former disorderly inclinations, instead of mitigating the rigours of repentance, you make them more disgusting and intolerable.

A change of life, therefore consists not merely in a reformation of your past disorders, but in a reformation accompanied with suitable acts of atonement to the divine justice. This is indispensable; and, notwithstanding the contrary opinion which you have probably formed on this head, it is not attended with much difficulty. The graces and consolations of Heaven sweeten the bitter pains of mortification and penance, and encourage the soul to proceed with alacrity and rapidity in the important task, until she shall have brought it to a happy termination. I will conclude with a few words on this subject.

3. Come to me, says our Saviour, all you who are wearied in the ways of iniquity: come, and taste the sweets of my yoke, and you shall find that peace and rest which you have sought in vain under the yoke of your passions: you shall find rest for your souls.

Yes, beloved Christians, instead of that inconstancy and ingratitude, which you have experienced from creatures; instead of that emptiness and puerility which accompanied your worldly pleasures; instead of that anxiety, solicitude, and remorse, which were the attendants of dissipation, your souls will overflow with the most enrapturing delights of innocence and peace. With what interior joy will you exclaim: "Hitherto I have lived only for vanity. The days, the years, the afflictions that are past, are now as nothing: they are lost: they are obliterated even from the memory of that world, for which alone I have lived. My civilities, my condescensions, my services, have been repaid only with ingratitude. But now, everything that I shall either do or suffer for Jesus, will be placed to account: every act of self-denial, every trivial sacrifice, every sigh, every tear will be registered in indelible characters in the book of life; they will be all recorded in the memory of the great Master whom I serve; they will be all, notwithstanding the deficiencies arising from the weakness of human nature, they will be all purified by the blood of my Redeemer: my merits, indeed will be nothing, independently of his grace; but he will

crown his own gifts with an infinite reward. I live now for eternity alone: I no longer labour in vain: my life is no longer labour in vain: my life is no more a dream." Could you, my beloved brethren, taste the ineffable consolations which this soliloquy imparts to the penitent sinner, you would be enraptured; you would exclaim in concert with all the holy servants of God: "Piety is a treasure indeed! The man who is truly converted to the Lord, receives an hundredfold, even in this life, for the sacrifices which he immolates on the altar of repentance."

I will not, however, pretend to assert, that the true penitent is entirely free from uneasiness and solicitude: experience proves the contrary; and therefore I acknowledge, that the recollection of his past disloyalties will sometimes throw a gloom over his mind. But, notwithstanding his incertitude whether he be worthy of love or hatred, the secret peace which reigns within gives testimony that Jesus is there; and the ineffable interior delights which he enjoys, convince him that God has received him again into favour. I acknowledge, likewise, that the lively ideas of the infinite justice of God, and of the multitude of his sins, will sometimes excite apprehension and alarm. But these are trials sent only for the exercise of his humility, and are, consequently, of short duration: he quickly hears the voice of Jesus in his soul: "*Oh! thou of little faith, why dost thou doubt?* Have I not given thee sufficient proofs of my protection and benevolence? Recall to mind all that I have done, in order to snatch thee from the abyss of perdition. I seek not with such earnestness the sheep that is not dear to me. I never should carry carry it on my shoulders with such patience, if I intended that it should perish before my eyes. Mistrust not my goodness. Thy only motives for alarm, are thy own tepidity and inconstancy."

This, beloved Christians, is but a faint description of the pleasures which enliven the paths of virtue. Why then will you hesitate? Are you restrained by the fear of difficulties? Ungenerous souls! You have endured the anguish and remorse of sin without complaint for many years; and is it possible that you should dread the holy sorrows of repentance? You have borne the yoke of the world—a yoke which admitted neither of ease, nor of comfort, nor of real pleasure; and will you dare to call the yoke of the Lord insupportable? Be no longer the dupes of imaginary fears. The anxieties, and the pains to which you have been accustomed, have prepared you for the sufferings of penance. This apprenticeship will make every thing easy, particularly

as your future labours will be accompanied and sweetened by the graces and consolations of heaven.

Good God! having walked so long in the rugged paths of sin, and under the hard tyranny of the world and my passions, is it possible that I should be unable to walk with thee, under the wings of thy mercy, and supported by thy powerful arm? Art thou then a hard master? No: the world knows thee not, and therefore it supposes that thou impartest no consolations to thy faithful servants. But we, O Lord, we know thee. We know that thou art the best of Masters, the most tender of Fathers, the most faithful of Friends, the most bountiful of Benefactors. We know that thou wilt pour thy choicest gifts on thy servants during their mortal pilgrimage, and give them a foretaste of that eternal happiness which thou hast prepared for them in heaven.

III.—THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."—*John*, i, 23.

The paternal solicitude of our Jesus, ever attentive to the interests of his beloved creatures, and desirous of insuring to himself the free and sole possession of our hearts, continues to invite us, by the mouth of the Baptist, during this time of Advent, to *make straight his ways*, and to remove the impediments which have hitherto obstructed the channel of his graces, and prevented our complete and permanent union with him. These impediments are the crimes which we commit,—the passions by which our unthinking hearts are led astray, and the occasions of sin, which have so often proved fatal to our innocence. The means by which alone these impediments can be removed, are a change of heart, and a complete reform of life, accompanied with a true and sincere repentance.

To this gracious invitation he adds threats. He commands his ministers to display before you the miseries which await impenitence, and the dangers of delay, and to declare openly that, "unless you do penance you shall inevitably perish.

This is not all: he speaks to you in the interior of your souls: "Is it not time," he says, "to arise from that abyss of wickedness, in which you have been so long immersed?

Why will you not turn your thoughts to your eternal welfare, and consecrate the short remaining period of your lives to my service, after having devoted so many years to vanity and folly?

To these importunities of your Creator, what reply do you make? Do you pour forth your soul in acts of thanksgiving for this his paternal, his gratuitous solicitude? Are you resolved to prostrate yourselves at his feet, and declare aloud, that you are ready to embrace the means which he has provided for your deliverance? Alas! this, I fear, is far from being the state of your mind. You are solicitous only to elude his importunities, and to refuse your consent: you say either that you have not sufficient grace to undertake so great a work; or that you are too much engaged in your pursuits to think of a reform of life at the present time. These, in general, are your pretexts. To these, therefore, I will call your attention; and I will prove, in the plainest terms, that they are groundless, that they are injurious to God, and that they are prejudicial in the highest degree to your eternal welfare.

1. It is not uncommon for those sinners, who are determined not to forsake their evil ways, to attempt to justify themselves by alleging the incompetency of man to effect the great work of an entire change of life, by his own powers alone. "A particular grace from God," they say, "is necessary, and indispensably necessary for the success of such an arduous undertaking: happy they who have been favoured with his grace! As for them, they have long waited with anxious expectations of receiving it: but, as yet, it has not pleased God to dispense to them so inestimable a blessing."

Plausible as this pretext may appear, a slight examination will prove that it is unjust on the part of the sinner, injurious to God, and unwarrantable in itself.

If in this assembly, there is any individual whose impenitence is owing to this cause, let me beg the favour of his attention for a few moments. Christian brother, I allow in the first instance, that a true and sincere reformation of life cannot be effected without the grace of God, and if it be true that you have never been blessed with that grace, your impenitence has some excuse. But this is what you cannot assert with justice. If you take a review of your past life, you will be convinced that God favoured you in every stage of it with the most singular graces. He blessed you with a happy disposition and a good heart. He favoured you with the light of faith, provided you with the necessary instructors,

and nourished you with his sacraments. When you turned your back upon him, and walked in the ways of iniquity, he followed after you with the solicitude of a parent, and importuned you, by his graces and inspirations, to return to his embraces: he did not suffer your conscience to be hardened in guilt: he convinced you of the emptiness and vanity of sinful pleasures, and tortured you with anxiety and remorse: he displayed before your eyes the charms of innocence, and by the voice of his ministers, urged you in the most pressing terms to give peace to your soul by throwing yourself into his arms: at the time even that I am speaking, he works within you, and inspires me with these sentiments in order to reclaim you. Ah! my dear friend, your whole life has been one continued chain of graces; and you will discover hereafter, that it has been your greatest crime to have received so much, and to have profited so little.

If, indeed, by *grace*, you mean that *miraculous grace*, which in a moment converted Paul the persecutor into an apostle, you probably have never yet received it, and more probably never will: it would be presumption to expect it. No: you will never receive a grace that will exempt you from difficulties, that will break your chains, and subdue your passions without your concurrence. Your conversion will necessarily cost you dear: you will have many struggles with corrupt nature before your evil inclinations are repressed, before you can tear yourselves from the dear, but criminal objects of your affections, and make the sacrifice of every thing that holds you in captivity. The grace which the saints received, and which made them saints, did not exempt them from these conflicts; and if you wait for a greater grace before you enter upon the work of self-reformation, you might as well give up your soul for lost, and consign yourself to the horrors of despair.

There is another subject likewise for your consideration: by alleging that you never have been favoured with the grace on which alone a change of life depends, you are guilty of ingratitude against God, and tacitly accuse him of being in some degree, the author of your impenitence. You might as well say in plain terms: "God alone can change my heart, and, therefore, it is to no purpose that I attempt it without his special concurrence: I must wait his good time; I have only to spend my days agreeably in pleasure and sin: and when he thinks proper, he will divest me of the old man, and clothe me with the new, without any labour on my part, without my thinking of it, without any previous disposition, but a life of wickedness and opposition to his graces: sal-

vation—that great, that only business for which I came into the world, is no longer entrusted to me: the Lord has reserved the means, and taken it entirely on himself." But, my friend, let me ask, in what new gospel is this promise contained, for it is not in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Ah! with reason does the prophet exclaim: the sinner can only speak foolish things in justification of himself, and he will endeavour to extenuate his crimes in opposition even to himself. (*Isa.*, xxxii, 6).

Lastly, this pretext is irrational in itself. For what consequence can you deduce, supposing it were true that God had never visited you with his grace? That you would not be accountable for the sins you commit, were you to die impenitent? You dare not say it. That you are allowed to extend the catalogue of your crimes, till God shall please to touch your heart, and impart to you the long-expected grace? That the delay of your repentance will not be criminal in the sight of God, because it depends not on your will? If this excuse, my dear friend, were admissable, every sinner that defers his repentance, and dies in his sins, would be justified; the gates of hell would be shut, and the broad road, in which the multitude are said to walk, would be annihilated. O man! exclaims the apostle, in opposition to the folly, and impiety of this pretext, O man! is it thus that you despise the riches of the bounty of your God? Are you not aware that his patience in enduring your crimes ought to be the most cogent motive to hasten your repentance, and not to be alleged as the motive for the continuance of your disorders?

If God had actually refused you the assistance of his grace, the following is the only rational consequence to be deduced; namely, that your eternal welfare is exposed to the most imminent danger, that it is your duty to pray incessantly for the inestimable blessing of which you are deprived, and to endeavour, by every means in your power to appease the anger of God, and, as it were, to take heaven by storm: that it is your duty, in the meantime, to avoid the occasions where your innocence has been so often endangered, and to renounce the worldly affections which have hitherto shut your heart against the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. This, my dear friend, would be giving glory to God in a truly Christian manner: this would be sincerely confessing his supreme dominion over the heart, and acknowledging that he is the Giver of every good gift. But to be continually repeating, that God will visit you when in his mercy he shall think fit, and in the meantime, making no efforts to relinquish the error of your ways, is the height of impiety: you might as well

say, I am not inclined at the present moment to enter upon the service of God: I can do without him yet a little longer: I live happy and content: when he forces me to attend to his calls, and when I can no longer avoid his solicitations, then will I yield, then will I say, *Lord, here I am:* but in the meantime I will enjoy my good fortune and indulge the liberty he has given me of deferring my conversion to a future period. What a preparation is this, my beloved, for receiving that inestimable grace which works a change of heart! Nevertheless, this it is that gives confidence to the sinner, and hardens him in his guilt.

But beware, beloved Christians: the longer you defer your change of life, the less grace you will receive: the more your crimes are multiplied, the farther will God remove himself from you. The moments of mercy flow rapidly on: the dreadful time of indignation approaches, and, if it be true that you have not sufficient grace to effect your change to-day, in a short time you will probably not have sufficient grace to be sensible that you stand in need of repentance.

2. There is another, and perhaps a more numerous class of sinners, who defer their conversion, not on account of any deficiency of grace, but because they are too much attached to the world; and are deluded by the supposition, that, if they reform their conduct at a later period of life, their salvation will be as secure as if they embraced the austerities of repentance at the present moment.

They say, that they cannot devote their younger years to the severe duties of religion; that their blood is too warm to submit to such multiplied restraints; but that the time will come, when their passions will be cooled, and the pleasures of the world less attractive; and that then they will apply to their eternal concerns in good earnest.

In reply to this pretext, it is natural to ask, whether you have an absolute assurance that you will reach that time of life: that death will not surprise you, during the course of those years, which you so deliberately devote to your passions; and that the Lord, whom you expect only at the third watch, will not come at the first or second watch, at a time when you least expect him? Ah! the thousands whom you see drop into the grave in the very prime of life, proclaim the uncertainty of the term of your existence: perhaps the sentence is even already pronounced against you: "Thou fool! this night, *perhaps*, thy soul will be required of thee:" and, if so, what will thy projects of a future conversion avail thee?

Supposing, however, that you are permitted to reach that advanced stage of life: are you certain that you will be then

more disposed to enter upon a new course of life than you are to-day? Did age change the heart of Solomon, of Saul, of Jezabel, of Herodias? It was then that their passions mounted to the highest pitch, and that their crimes were multiplied beyond number. The same, probably, will be your lot: your old age will either be contaminated with the follies of your youth, or, if satiety should create a disgust for the grosser passions, it will be attended with the hardness of heart, and a seared conscience, which will infallibly lead to final impenitence.

However, for the sake of argument, we will suppose that you have received an assurance that you will both attain to an old age, and be then sincerely reformed. Nevertheless, can you, my beloved brethren, can you seriously and deliberately resolve on treating your God in this unworthy, this contemptuous manner? He is the Lord of all ages and times; he requires that both the bud, the bloom, and the decay of life be consecrated to him: he is a jealous God: he will not give his glory to another, nor endure a partner in our affections. And can you resolve before hand to devote the most precious part of your life to the Devil and his works, and reserve only the shattered remains for your God? Can you have the hardened boldness to say: Lord, when I am no longer capable of enjoying the world, I will turn to thee. I shall be always sure of finding thee. But the world, after a certain time, will no longer be an object of amusement. I must enjoy it before it is gone. At a certain age it will reject me; and then for want of other pleasures, I will turn to thee: thou alone shalt possess my soul. Worthless creature! with reason may I address to you the words which the prophet Isaiah addressed to his idolatrous neighbours: "You take," says he, "a cedar of Lebanon, you choose the best parts for your pleasures and luxuries, and not knowing how to employ the remainder, you carve an image of your idol, and bow down before it, and worship it." —*Isa.*, xliv, 15. You, in the same manner, select the most precious parts of your life, and devote them to your passions: and not knowing how to employ the wretched remnant, which has become unfit for the world, you make an idol of it, you consecrate it to religion, and vainly flatter yourselves that your offering will be acceptable to God!

Ah! be not deceived, my beloved friends. You certainly will reap in an advanced age the fruits of that only which you sowed in your youth. "If you sow in corruption," says the apostle, "you shall reap in corruption."—*Gal.*, vi, 8. As you live so shall you die.

You perhaps may say, that happy is the man who has served the Lord from his youth; and that happy you should have been, if you had enjoyed the same blessing: but, unfortunately, you have followed the beaten track of the world, and are now engaged in pursuits from which you cannot desist until a more favourable opportunity arrives.

But, my beloved, are you certain that this favourable opportunity will ever arrive? Are you certain that you will not be surprised by death? Would you be the first that was surprised in his sins? Ah! this is the common lot of all who walk in the broad ways of the world. Could you but attend the minister of the Lord when he is summoned to the bed of sickness: could you hear the useless regrets, the vain protestations of the measures they would have taken, had they foreseen their approaching dissolution, you would be convinced that, seldom is there a man that has completely renounced his passions, and prepared himself by repentance for his last end. If you defer your conversion, the same melancholy task shall we have one day to perform for you. You will summon us in your turn: and, instead of congratulating with you on your timely repentance, we shall be necessitated to listen to your useless regrets, and endeavour, perhaps in vain, to inspire you with sentiments of sincere sorrow, and engage you to look forward with hope to the result of that dreadful scrutiny, for which you intended to have been prepared, and are not.

Perhaps, however, you may say, that you are disposed at the present time to reform your lives; that you are fully convinced of the emptiness and folly of worldly pleasures, and would gladly renounce them in order to labour in earnest for your salvation; but that you are diffident; that you are afraid lest the difficulties necessarily attending such an important and arduous undertaking should discourage you; and that, if you make the attempt, and fail, you would be exposed to the ridicule and scorn of all your acquaintance.

But, my dear friends, whence originates this fear? You defer your repentance on the supposition that God will touch your heart at a future period: and, if you reform to-day, you say that you dare not rely on his assistance! You confide in his mercies at the time you offend him; and you cannot confide in them when you attempt to serve him! O man! where is that reason, that soundness of judgment on which you pride yourselves? Are you then only senseless and contradictory, when your salvation is at stake?

Would it not be more reasonable to say: I will begin at least; I will try what I can do with the help and assistance

of God; the experiment is certainly worth making. The man who is surprised by the sudden torrent, and in danger of perishing, endeavours to reach the land, and does not give himself up for lost until his strength is exhausted. He does not say: Perhaps I shall not succeed; my strength may possibly fail me; and therefore I will not try to save myself. No: he exerts his whole strength; he stretches every nerve; he yields not, till he is fairly overpowered by the force of the torrent that opposes him. You, my friends, are in danger of perishing: the waters gain upon you; the torrent is carrying you away; and will you hesitate whether it be prudent to endeavour to save yourselves? Will you sacrifice to deliberation the few moments which alone remain for you to effect your escape, and avoid the death which has overtaken so many before your eyes?

Supposing, however, that you were unable to endure the severities of repentance, and that you were obliged to desist, still you would have the satisfaction to reflect, that you had spent some time in innocence; that you had made some efforts to appease an angry God; that you had avoided some sins; and that the treasure of divine wrath, which is laid up against you, is not quite so great as it otherwise would have been. You would have acquired a right to represent your weakness to your Lord: Lord, thou seest my weakness. You would have a right to say: Thou art witness to the desires of my heart: why am I not more resolute in thy service, more hardened against the allurements of the world, and more watchful over myself? Put a final conclusion, O Lord, to my inconstancy; deprive the world of the dominion which it still holds over my heart; take possession of thy ancient rights, and draw me not to thee by halves, lest I forsake thee again. I have so often sworn to thee eternal love —I have so often prostrated myself at thy feet, and with my eyes bathed in tears, confessed my iniquities, and have again returned to my former ways, that I can no longer confide in my own strength. With a heart so fickle and inconstant, what can I expect? Be moved, O Lord, at the sight of my danger and distress: my weakness discourages and alarms me: I know that inconstancy in thy ways is a presage of perdition. But, my God! whilst I am yet susceptible of the impressions of thy grace, I will endeavour to return to thee; and, if I must lose my soul, I will rather perish in the attempt to be virtuous, than seek an imaginary, a terrible tranquility in a fixed and declared revolt against thee, and, thus renounce the hope of those eternal goods which thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants.

IV.—FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED FOR A WORTHY COMMUNION.

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."—*Luke*, iii, 4.

These words the Church incessantly repeats during the time of Advent, in order to infuse into our souls a perfect knowledge of the dispositions which are required for worthily celebrating the approaching solemnity of Christmas. "Prepare," she says, "the ways of the Lord—make his paths straight. Let the valleys be filled up, and the mountains and hills be levelled; let the crooked roads be made straight, and the rough smooth." Or, in other words, prepare yourselves, my dear children, to reap the abundant harvest of this mystery by humiliation of heart, by meekness and charity, by uprightness and uniformity of life, by renouncing your own vain wisdom and exalted ideas, and by the spirit of self-denial and penance.

In the name of the Church, therefore, I address the same words to those of my present auditory who piously intend at this time to purify their souls by the sacrament of penance, and to prepare a place for the spiritual birth of Jesus in their hearts, by a worthy communion. "Prepare the way of the Lord." The sacrament which you propose to receive, is the most solemn rite of our religion, and the source of the greatest graces. Take every precaution, adopt every means which can contribute to prepare your souls for a worthy communication with the Deity; for there is this dreadful alternative—if your hearts be not worthily disposed, this Heavenly bread, instead of nourishing your souls, and fitting you for eternal life, will draw down on your heads the heaviest judgments—even eternal damnation. Perhaps you may say: If there be this alternative, it would be more advisable to abstain from this divine food. By no means; in this bread alone will you find the true nourishment of your souls: it is the strength of the strong, and the support of the weak; the consolation of the afflicted, and the pledge of eternal happiness. To communicate seldom, is the surest way to communicate unworthily. I repeat, therefore, again—"Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

The importance of the subject is worthy your most serious attention. On the one side, you are to avoid the most

grievous of all crimes—the profanation of the body and blood of the Son of God; and on the other, you are to qualify yourselves in a proper manner for reaping the immense fruits of a worthy communion. The dispositions which are indispensably requisite for this important work, I will reduce to three—namely, a lively faith, a pure conscience, and an ardent love: these I will discuss as briefly as the subject will permit.

1. The first disposition required is *a lively faith.* I speak not of that faith which distinguishes us from unbelievers, and which the mercy of God infused into our souls in our very infancy; but I speak of that faith, which pierces the clouds where the Most High resides—I speak of that faith, which beholds him, not as through a perspective glass, but as if face to face—I speak of that faith, which sees the angels covering their faces with their wings, and the pillars of Heaven trembling in the presence of this great King—of that faith, which would not be increased by the testimony of the senses, and which is happy, not because it has not seen and has believed, but because here its belief has made him, as it were, present to the sight—I speak of that humble faith, which approaches to the altar, like Moses to the burning bush, like the Israelites to Mount Sinai—of that faith, which feels the presence of the Deity, and which cries out with St. Peter: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a mortal man and a sinner"—*Luke*, v, 8,—I speak of that faith, which annihilates the soul in the presence of the God of majesty, and fills her with dread lest she should present herself at his table without due dispositions—without the wedding garment.

This is the faith which the apostle requires in all who approach the holy table. But, my God! can such a faith be found upon earth? If thou wert again to appear amongst us, thou wouldst find thy chosen people, the Christians, as sensual and as carnal, as thy once chosen people, the Jews: thou wouldst be a stranger amongst us. Ah! my beloved, when he shall be seen coming in the clouds of Heaven, men shall wither away through fear; the sinner shall hide his face, and call out to the mountains to fall upon him and cover him. And is not the same God seated upon our altars? Do not the celestial spirits descend from Heaven and minister to the priest when he offers up the tremendous mysteries? Yes; from this mysterious tribunal the great God of heaven examines the heart of every individual that bends his knee before him: he separates the elect from the reprobate; he passes the sentence of death

and of life; he holds the thunders of his vengeance in one hand, and crowns of glory in the other.

Formerly, no one could see God and live. The unhappy Bethshamites were exterminated merely for looking into the ark: Heliodorus was chastised visibly by angels from Heaven, because he presumed to enter the sanctuary: the Israelites were not permitted to approach the mount when God gave the commandments. But now, because the fire of his wrath does not burst forth from our altars, and destroy the wretch who presumes unworthily to approach him, we receive him into our breasts without fear, without respect! Half an hour employed in reciting a set form of prayers, is our only preparation: we receive him; we recite a few more prayers in the same tepid manner as the first, and depart, perhaps never more to thank him for this unutterable favour.

Ah! if we beheld the body of the Lord in its glorified state present before us; if the testimony of faith made the same impression on our mind as the testimony of the senses, with what sentiments should we present ourselves at the sacred table! How constantly, how profoundly would our thoughts be employed even for a month beforehand! And when the time itself drew near, with what ardour should we devote the preceding days to retirement, to silence, to prayer and mortification! Yes, my beloved; every instant would increase our solicitude, our fears, and our joy. With difficulty should we be able to divest ourselves sufficiently of that awful respect with which the presence of incomprehensible majesty inspired us, and to assume sufficient confidence to open our hearts to so great a guest. Whether we were engaged in our accustomed occupations, in company, or in amusements, we should be unable to divert our thoughts from this subject: Jesus, and his infinite love and condescension, would engross our whole attention. The Christian who is affected in this manner, truly discerns the body of the Lord.

The worldly man, I acknowledge, is troubled and confused on the approach of a solemnity, when either custom, example, or the laws of the Church, require that he should present himself at the table of the Lord. But, my God! whence originate these sentiments? From a heart overflowing with love and fear? From a heart which is convinced of its unworthiness, and which, prostrate in spirit at the feet of Christ, implores the pardon of its multiplied transgressions? No, my beloved; they are engendered by a heart which delights not in the things of God; which loathes the delicacies of the banquet of the Lord; which like the

blind and the dumb in the Gospel, is dragged by the laws of the Church from the lanes and hedges and highways of perdition and placed against its will at the marriage table.

The true Christian, on the contrary, has a greater relish for this heavenly bread than for all the luxuries of the world. This divine food is the only comfort in his banishment, the remedy for all his evils, the alleviation of all his afflictions, the desirable object of his wishes and tears. He is more attentive, more cautious, more solicitous in his preparations to receive it, than about any other action in life.

Now, my brethren, examine yourselves and certify with candour and impartiality, whether or not you are animated with this lively faith of the true Christian. We will then proceed to the second part of the preparation, which consists in a purified conscience, and to which St. Paul alludes in these words: "Let a man prove himself before he eat of this bread."—1 *Cor.*, xi.

2. But in what does this probation consist? Is it merely in the confession of sins, and in the transitory sentiments of contrition, with which the generality of Christians are animated on these occasions? Far from it. You must reflect, that you are hastening to receive the body of Jesus Christ, the bread of angels, the Lamb without spot, who will endure those only in his sight who have either preserved their innocence undefiled, or have regained it by repentance. You must reflect that it is the Christian Passover, of which you propose to partake, and that the participation is lawful only to those who are the disciples of Jesus indeed; who renounce their own will, who carry their cross, and who walk in the footsteps of their crucified Saviour. You must reflect, that you are about to receive a God of such infinite purity, that the angels are not clean in his sight, and consequently that you must banish from your heart every defilement, every stain that is offensive to the eyes of his sanctity. This, my beloved, is your probation. Examine yourselves, therefore; look into the state of your souls; scrutinize your affections; reason with yourselves in this manner: I am invited to partake of the sacred body and blood of my Jesus, and to partake in such a manner as to be changed into him. But when this great Searcher of hearts shall enter into my breast, will he discover nothing that is unworthy of the sanctity of his presence? Will he find the source of my passions and vices dried up, or will he find that the torrent is pent up only for a time? Will he say to my soul, as he said to Zaccheus: "This day salvation is come to this house!"—*Luke*, xix, 9.

Have I entirely subdued that passion which has so long exercised its tyranny over me—that spirit of resentment, of which I acknowledged myself guilty and repentant at the feet of God's minister—that love of riches which has so often led me into acts of injustice—that unequal and capricious temper, which is impassioned by the slightest contradiction—that vanity, which despises the lowly state in which my forefathers lived—that envy, which was always jealous of the reputation and prosperity of my equals—that censorious and malignant disposition, which is always ready to condemn the actions of others, and to applaud my own—that spirit of sensuality, of pleasure, and of immortification, which reigns in my whole frame? Has the confession of my crimes entirely eradicated them from my heart? Am I a new man? What am I, O God? Am I dead, or am I alive in thy sight? Enlighten my eyes, I beseech thee, and suffer not thy Christ thy Holy One, to see corruption. In this manner, beloved friends, ought we to prove ourselves. God forbade the Jews to offer honey and leaven in sacrifice: see that you bring not to the altar the leaven of sin and the honey of pleasure; I mean that love of pleasure and the world, that soft and effeminate disposition, which is an enemy to the cross, and irreconcileable with salvation.

3. In the third place, when we communicate, we must endeavour to be animated with the same sentiments with which our Lord was animated when he instituted this sacrament. "I have ardently longed," said he to his apostles, "to eat this pasch with you."—*Luke* xxii, 15. He sighed for the happy moment; the thought of it soothed the agonizing pains which were occasioned by the foresight of his approaching passion. Here then is our model: we must seat ourselves at this heavenly table with a heart burning with the seraphic flames of love, with a heart panting after the waters of life, with a heart tormented with a holy hunger and thirst for the body and blood of her Redeemer. "Lord, come and take full possession of my soul," the pious Christian exclaims with St. Augustine. (*Conf.*, b. 1, c. 5). "Come, O Lord, and be my only delight; satisfy my eager desires, inebriate me with the torrent of thy pleasures, take off my affections from all creatures, from the whole world itself, and unite me to thee for ever. If thou shouldst discover in my soul any remains of my former corruption, cleanse me with thy grace: command 'that I may be made whole.'—*John*, v, 6. Come, O Lord, and delay not; every good thing will come together with thee; sufferings, persecutions, afflictions, and humiliations, will appear as nothing when I shall have tasted thy

ineffable sweetness." These, my beloved, are the sentiments which ought to accompany us to the altar.

But, alas! what are the sentiments of the generality of Christians? Some have a loathing, a disgust for this divine food; to partake of it at the time of indulgences is thought too often; some would not communicate even once a year, were they not driven to the altar by the anathemas and excommunications of the Church. My God! is it possible that this precept of love which constitutes the whole happiness of a Christian on earth, should be considered even by a single individual as a painful duty? Is it possible that the most glorious privilege with which man can be favoured should be a subject of constraint and disquietude? Didst thou expect such treatment, O divine Jesus! when, out of compassion to lost man, thou didst bequeath thyself to him in this adorable sacrament? Others approach the altar with a sluggish heart, a depraved taste, a frozen soul. These people frequent the sacraments, and indulge in worldly pleasures alternately: they partake as freely of the table of Satan as of the table of Jesus: they attempt to serve two masters. A communion costs them only one day of restraint and reserve; their devotion ends with the solemnity, they are content with what they have done, and they return, as if by a preconcerted agreement with self-love, to their former ways. Thus they come to the banquet with a palate vitiated by the pleasures and follies of the world: they taste not the sweets of this heavenly food; the tumult of their passions, the recollection of their unlawful pastimes, make a greater impression on their minds than the presence of Jesus. Against these the Royal Prophet denounces a curse: "May their table be to them a snare, a stumbling-block, and a scandal."—*Ps.*, lxviii, 23.

To communicate in commemoration of Jesus, my beloved brethren, we must awaken in our souls all the tender emotions which are naturally excited in the mind of a lover when communing with the object of his dearest affections. The most tender connections are weakened, the warmest friendship is cooled by absence. Jesus foresaw, that, after his ascension, his disciples would soon forget his favours and instructions. Moses was only forty days on the mount, and yet, in that short interval of time, the Israelites forgot the prodigies which he had wrought in their favour: "Let us make gods," they said, "who may go before us, and defend us from our enemies"—*Exod.*, xxxii, 1. In consideration of this our natural inconstancy, the paternal goodness of our divine Redeemer would not leave us in an orphan and defenceless state; his infinite love would not expose us to the

danger of forgetting him, and therefore he descends daily on our altars—he resides constantly in our tabernacles : from hence the voice of the turtle dove is heard calling to her beloved, (*Cant.*, ii. 12) ; here we may enjoy his presence, and dwell with increasing raptures on his wonders, his blessings, and his love.

Our pious ancestors, with a truly religious spirit, visited the land which he had sanctified by his presence. The sentiments which were inspired by the sight of the places where he wrought his principal miracles, and shed his precious blood for our salvation, gave confidence to repenting sinners, endowed the weak with strength, and inflamed the just with increased ardour.

It is not necessary, however, to cross the seas. Salvation is near at hand. The word which we preach will, if you please, rest on your lips and in your heart. Open the eyes of faith—fix them on the altar, and you will see, not a country which he formerly sanctified by his presence, but Jesus Christ himself. Approach, then, in commemoration of him ; draw near to this unquenchable fire of love ; rekindle in your breasts the seraphic flames of affection and gratitude. Learn from his meekness, which would not suffer him "to break the bruised reed, or extinguish the smoking flax"—*Isa.*, xlii, 3 ; *Matt.*, xii, 20 ; that is, to revenge the injuries he received from the weakest, the most defenceless of mankind : learn, I say, to correct the sallies of an impatient and hasty temper. From his laborious and painful life, learn to renounce a life of softness and ease. From his modesty and humility, learn to correct the odious passions of pride and vain glory. From his zeal against the profaners of his temple, learn to present yourselves before him with respect and fear. From his fast of forty days, learn to exercise yourselves in the holy virtues of mortification and penance. From his love and charity for lost man, learn to pity the distresses of the afflicted, and to relieve their wants. From his pious and instructive conversation with his disciples, learn to converse with your neighbour in the language of piety and instruction. In a word, from his innocence and example, learn to correct every imperfection, every weakness to which you have hitherto been subject. In this manner, you will communicate in commemoration of Jesus.

But, if you approach the altar with a heart constantly defiled with the same imperfections—imperfections a hundred times repented of, and never sincerely renounced ; if you do not endeavour to advance daily more and more in the ways of perfection, but propose to yourselves a certain degree of

sanctity, beyond which you never intend to pass; if you relapse as often as you pretend to repent, and, after many years, are not more devout than you were at first; if you continue addicted to animosities, dislikes, calumny, detraction, vanity, and pride; and if you are as unmortified, and as much the enemy of the cross of Christ as before, oh! you, have more than sufficient reason to tremble.

Perhaps you may ask: Does the Christian, who is defiled with these habitual imperfections, receive the body of the Lord unworthily? This question can be solved only by the great Searcher of hearts. The following is the only answer that man can give—namely, that such a one does not communicate in commemoration of Jesus; that, at the last day, many things which appear right and just to man, will be discovered to have been abominations in the eyes of God; that many who had even prophesied in his name, will be rejected with, "I know you not;" and that the state of such a communicant is exposed to the greatest danger. Peter, although the voice of Truth had declared him undefiled, was not permitted to partake of the last supper until Jesus had washed his feet. Magdalen, although she had washed away her sins, and bathed the feet of her Saviour with floods of tears, was forbidden to touch him after his resurrection; because her eagerness was not divested of every imperfection. And we, defiled and imperfect as we are—strangers to true penance—intent only on enjoyment and ease—tepid and callous to the tender feelings of divine love—we, who neither endeavour nor desire to advance in piety beyond a certain point, we *frequently* partake of his sacred body!

Oh! what an abyss, my friends, perhaps what a multitude of crimes is concealed from our view, of which we repent not, because we are ignorant of their existence; and which, perhaps, are the stock on which we engraft innumerable profanations! What an abyss! I say again—what a mystery of iniquity will, perhaps, be revealed on the day of final retribution!

What am I in thy sight, O God! I can neither please thee nor displease thee by halves; my state will not allow me to steer a middle course between virtue and vice; if I am not a saint, I am a sacrilegious profaner: if I am not a vessel of honour, I am a vessel of dishonour: if I am not an angel of light (there is no medium), I am an angel of darkness: if I am not the living temple of the Holy Ghost, I am a den of unclean spirits. Good God! what powerful motives are here for vigilance, circumspection, fear, and love, when we receive the holy communion.

Ah! the fruits produced by one worthy communion are so abundant, so manifest, the soul is overwhelmed with such a torrent of Heavenly graces and communications, that, had I no other reason to suspect the unworthiness of my communions than the little profit I reap from them, I should have sufficient reason to tremble. The Christian who partakes worthily of this sacred food, feels his pious hunger increased; and I retire from the holy table fatigued and satiated; I rejoice that the business is concluded, as if it were a painful, an unwelcome task. The Christian who partakes worthily of this sacred food, lives only for God; and I continue to live for the world, for myself, for my friends, for my family; seldom do I live a single day for God alone. What then must I do? Ought I to refrain from this sacred food? What! shall the fruit of the tree of life be forbidden me? What! shall the bread of consolation be no more broken for me? No, my God! thou wilt not banish me from thy table. Thou willest only that I put on the wedding garment; thou dost not refuse me the bread of thy children, but thou willest that I should not, by my unworthiness, oblige thee to give me a serpent in its place.

Come, then, dear Jesus, and prepare a place in my heart worthy of thy presence; humble my pride; correct my failings; purify my desires. Thou alone canst be the precursor to prepare thy ways. Fill the immense void in my soul with the gifts of thy Holy Spirit; enable me to partake worthily of thy sacred body at the approaching solemnity, and to live solely and eternally for thee, O Jesus, my Mediator, my Lord, my God, and my all; to whom be honour, and power, and praise, and glory, and benediction, for ever and ever. Amen.

V.—CHRISTMAS DAY.

ON THE BENEFITS CONFERRED ON MAN BY THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David."—*Luke*, ii, 10 11.

These are the great tidings which had raised the expectations of the world during the long period of four thousand years; this is the great event which so many prophets had foretold, so many ceremonies had prefigured, so many just men had

looked for, and which all nature seemed to promise and to hasten by the universal corruption of all flesh; this is the great blessing which the goodness of God had prepared for man from the time that the infidelity of his first parents had subjected him to sin and death.

The Saviour, the Christ, the Lord, at length appears on the earth. The clouds rain down the Just One; the Star of Jacob is manifested to the universe; the sceptre is taken from Juda; and he who was to come is arrived; the Lord exhibits to his chosen people the promised sign; a virgin conceives, and brings forth a son; and from Bethlehem the leader comes forth who is to instruct and govern his people, Israel.

What an accumulation of blessings does this birth announce to the children of men! It would not have been so pompously announced, so ardently expected and desired during so many ages—it would not have been the great object of all the dispensations of God to man, had it not been the most signal testimony of love which the Almighty could give to his creatures. What a happy night! The heavens resound with canticles of thanksgiving and praise.

In order that we may be entitled to participate in the transports of joy which this wonderful mystery dispenses in heaven and on earth, it is necessary that we be disposed to partake of the blessings which it has purchased for us. The only cause of this universal gladness is the means of salvation which this mystery has procured for all mankind. If, therefore, instead of embracing these means, we are obstinately resolved on perishing, the Church weeps over us, and we mingle sorrow and grief with the joy which these happy tidings occasion.

But what are the inestimable blessings which the birth of the Son of God has purchased for man? They are proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds: "Glory to God on high and peace to men of good will." The glory which ignorant and infatuated man had attempted to usurp, is secured to God; and the peace to which man had been hitherto a stranger, is imparted to him. The first shall form the substance of the present discourse; and the second shall be reserved for a future discussion.

1. Man was placed on earth for the sole purpose of giving to the Author of his existence the glory and homage which exclusively belonged to him. Every created object reminded him of this duty. To the sovereign majesty of his God he owed the tribute of homage and adoration; to his paternal goodness, the tribute of love; to his infinite wisdom, the sacrifice of his reason and understanding. These duties

were engraven in his heart and implanted in his very nature: they were incessantly announced to him by every creature. Man could not listen to the dictates of his own heart, or to the silent voice of the inanimate creation, without hearing them enforced. Nevertheless, he forgot them; he turned a deaf ear to every admonition, and entirely effaced them from his mind. The idolater gave to creatures that glory which was due to the Creator alone. The Jew honoured him with his lips, and confined his testimonies of love and gratitude to an exterior homage which was unworthy of his infinite majesty. While the philosopher, bewildered and lost in the intricacies of his own researches, measured the understanding of God by that of man, and vainly thought that reason, which was a stranger even to its *own* nature, could fathom the deepest truths. With these three evils was the whole world infected. God was either not known, or not glorified; and man forgot his own weakness and corruption, by listening to the suggestions of ignorant pride.

To what excess did idolatry extend its profane worship! The death of an universally admired character was the signal for his introduction to the rank of a divinity, and his vile remains, on which his inanity was stamped in the most indelible character, became the title of his imaginary glory and immortality. Conjugal love had its peculiar deities: impure love imitated its example, and erected altars to its own shameful abominations. The adulterer and the fornicator had their temples, their priests, and their sacrifices. The general folly, or rather the general corruption, adopted this confused and detestable worship. The whole world was infected with it; the laws of empires authorized it. The splendour of the sacrifices, the magnificence of the temples, and the immense riches of the idols, gave an awful respectability to its extravagance.

Every nation was jealous of having gods of its own; and when no individual of the human species could be found, who had so far distinguished himself as to be judged worthy of the godhead, they prostituted their adoration to the brute creation. Impure homage became the worship of these impure divinities: cities, mountains, fields, and deserts were defiled by the superb edifices erected to the Gods of pride, impurity, and revenge. The multitude of divinities was equal to that of the passions; gods were almost as numerous as men; every thing was a God on earth, except the God who made it. He alone was unheard of by the greater number of his creatures. He alone was either rejected, forgotten, or unknown.

In this manner was the world, almost from the beginning plunged in the horrors of darkness and ignorance; every age added new impieties. The nearer the time approached which was decreed for the coming of the Messiah, the more did the corruption of man increase. Rome herself, the mistress of the world, adopted every mode of worship peculiar to the different nations who submitted to her yoke, and erected within her walls temples to the idols of every conquered people—temples which might be more properly denominated the public monuments of her folly, than of her victories.

But the general corruption of all flesh could not induce the Almighty to shower down the fire of his wrath on the guilty, as formerly on Sodom and Gomorrah, nor to exterminate the whole race by another deluge. No; his mercy had decreed to effect their salvation. He placed in the heavens the sign of his alliance with mankind; and this true sign was not the luminous rainbow which appears in the clouds, but Jesus Christ his only Son, the Word made flesh, the true seal of an eternal alliance, and the only light which enlighteneth the world.

On this day he appeared on earth, and restored to his Father the glory, which an impious idolatry had endeavoured to wrest from him. The homage which his pure and immaculate soul, united to the Word Incarnate, paid to the majesty of God, made abundant amends in an instant for all the honour which an ungrateful world had withheld from him, and prostituted on creatures. An adorer—God-man—gave more glory to the Divinity, than all ages and all idolatrous nations had taken from him.

Agreeable must this homage of an Incarnate God have been in the eyes of the Great Sovereign of the universe, since it alone erased idolatry from the earth, overturned its profane altars, crumbled to dust the vain idols, imposed silence on the oracles of devils, and changed their superb temples, which had hitherto been the asylums of every abomination, into houses of adoration and prayer. "Thus was the face of the earth renewed."—*Ps.*, ciii, 30. The only true God, who had hitherto been unknown in the midst of cities, the most renowned for learning and civilization, began to be adored; the World acknowledged its maker; God entered into the possession of his rights; a worship worthy of him was established over the earth; and adorers were selected in every place who began to adore him in spirit and truth.

This was the first benefit arising from the birth of Christ.

But, my beloved brethren, are we partakers of this benefit? We do not indeed adore idols; we abhor an incestuous Jupiter, an impure Venus, a dissolute Apollo, a cruel and vindictive Mars. But is the true God more glorified, in the whole, by us, than he was by the pagans? Do we not substitute in his place, and adore, riches, sensuality, the world and its pleasures? For, everything that we love more than God, we adore—everything that we prefer before our Creator, we make the god of our heart—every thing that exercises supreme dominion over our thoughts and actions, our desires and affections, our hopes and fears, is in reality the object of our worship: and in this sense may it not be said with truth, that our passions are our gods, and that to them we sacrifice the true God?

How many idols of this description are there in the Christian world? Impure love has its votaries: at its shrine are sacrificed riches, repose, peace of mind, and health both of body and soul. Wealth is a divinity which engrosses the thoughts, the cares, the actions, the soul, the mind, the will of thousands. Its altars are incessantly surrounded; and no sacrifice is refused which it exacts as the price of its favours.

Shameful intemperance, likewise, which vilifies the name and character of man, which is the bane of morality, which stupefies and drowns the brightest talents in the excesses of liquor and debauchery, and leaves a relish and inclination for nothing but the grossest pleasures of the sensual appetite; this shameful intemperance, I say, is another idol; and its senseless votaries proclaim, that life would not be worth enjoying, unless a considerable portion of it were consecrated to its worship.

The passions of men created the impure deities of heathenism: and Jesus destroyed those idols by subduing the passions which created them. You seat them again on their usurped throne when you indulge the same passions which made the whole world idolaters. Of what avail is it, therefore, to know that there is only one God, if you prostitute your homage to other objects? True worship proceeds from the heart; and if you devote not your heart to the service of God, you substitute, like the pagans, vile creatures in his place, and you give him not the glory which belongs to him.

The object, therefore, of the birth of Jesus was, not merely to manifest the name of his Father to mankind, and to establish on the ruins of idolatry the knowledge of the true God, but to form a congregation of adorers, who would place

neither merit nor reliance in exterior worship, when divested of the interior spirit of purity and love, and who would consider mercy, justice, and sanctity as the most acceptible offerings to the Divinity, and the most pompous ornaments of his worship. This is the second important benefit arising from the birth of Christ.

2. God was known in Judea, says the prophet. Judea erected no idol in her public places, nor paid to any other the homage which was due to the God of her father Abraham. (*Num.*, xxiii, 21). This was the only portion of the earth preserved from the general contagion. But the magnificence of her temple, the splendour of her sacrifices, the pomp of her solemnities, the exactitude of her legal observances, had alone engrossed the attention of her children. She entered not into the spirit of interior worship, but confined her whole religion to the strict performance of these exterior duties. The morals of her inhabitants were not less corrupt than those of the Gentiles. Injustice, fraud, deceit, adultery, and every vice were prevalent, and even promoted by their attention to exterior observances alone. God was honoured with the lips, but the hearts of this ungrateful people were far from him.

Jesus came to undeceive Judea of an error so gross, so ancient, and so injurious to his Father. He came to teach his people that, however satisfied man may be with the performance of mere exterior worship, God considers the heart alone; that every species of homage in which the heart has no share, is rather an insult and a mockery than true worship; that it is useless to purify the outside, if the inside continue defiled with corruption; and that the only adoration which is acceptable to him, is adoration in spirit and truth.

But, alas! my brethren, is not this gross error—this error which was so often the subject of our Saviour's reproaches against the synagogue, is it not, I say, the error of the greater number of Christians of the present time? In what does the chief part of our religion consist? It consists, I am afraid, in certain exterior observances alone, in fulfilling certain *public* duties prescribed by the laws of God and of the Church: and, what is more, I fear that the piety even of the more regular members of the Christian body extends no further. They assist at the holy mysteries regularly; they scruple to transgress the laws of the Church; they recite certain prayers to which they are habituated; they celebrate the solemn festivals by the frequentation of the sacraments; and this is all. They are not more detached than other men

from the world and its criminal pleasures; they are not less attentive to the vanities of dress, or to the acquisition of wealth: they are not more disposed to break off a criminal engagement, or to avoid the occasions which have always proved fatal to their innocence: they perform not even these exterior duties of religion either with a pure heart, a lively faith, or an unfeigned charity; all their passions maintain their influence, notwithstanding these religious exercises, which they are prompted to observe, probably, more out of respect to decency and custom, than from a sense of duty which they owe to God. I will allow, indeed, that they are actuated by a kind of fear: for, if they lived, like the impious, without attendance on any public duties of religion, without any exterior profession of worship, they would consider themselves as accursed in the sight of God, and worthy of the sudden and most dreadful judgments of heaven.

But how inconsistent is the heart of man! These very duties they do not scruple to violate, and render nugatory by their criminal excesses; and without remorse, without dread, or rather with the most presumptuous confidence, they dare to frustrate the effect of these superficial remnants of religion by a conduct which religion condemns and abhors; they continue on in the commission of crimes which will inevitably draw down the wrath of God, and they appear not to be conscious of their danger; they are satisfied in mind with what they do, and imagine that they give to God what belongs to him, whereas their only religion is, and has been all along, mere external homage—a homage which is entirely useless—a homage which He looks down upon with abhorrence and indignation.

Nevertheless, these, as I have already said, are the most upright—the most regular in the eyes of men, of all who are designated under the class of worldlings. They have not shaken off the yoke, like so many others; they blaspheme not what they do not understand; they laugh not at the sacred mysteries of religion; they consider not the service of God as beneath their attention. But, notwithstanding all this may be said of them, their attachment to religion is not centred in the heart; it possesses no influence over their conduct; they dishonour the service of God by their crimes; they are Christians only in name.

Thus, exterior pomp of worship exists amongst us, with depravation of morals more deeply rooted and more universal, than the prophets even imputed to the obduracy and hypocrisy of the Jews. Thus the religion in which we glory, is no more than a superficial mode of worship in respect to the

greater number of the faithful. Thus the new covenant, the law of spirit and life, which ought to be written on our hearts, and which ought to form adorers in spirit and truth, produces mere phantoms, false adorers, worshippers only in appearance, a people like the Jews, who honour him with their lips, but whose corrupted hearts, defiled with numberless crimes, and bound down to the earth by the chains of lawless passion, are always far removed from him.

In this second benefit, therefore, of the birth of Jesus, the greater number of Christians have no share. Jesus abolished the worship of the Jews because it was purely exterior, and confined to the sacrifices of beasts and to legal observances. In the place of these empty shadows he substituted a law which the heart alone can fulfil: he substituted a system of worship, of which the love of his Father is the first and principal act of homage. But this sacred worship, this new commandment of love, this holy deposit which he has bequeathed to us, has degenerated in our hands: we have debased it into a pharisaical worship, in which the heart has no share, which restrains not our irregular inclinations, which has no influence over our morals, and which makes us so much the more criminal, as we abuse the gift which was intended to eradicate our vices and purify our souls.

3. In the third place, the ignorance and corruption of mankind had deprived the Almighty of the glory which was due to his providence and eternal wisdom. The philosophers of old, who were necessitated by the voice of reason to acknowledge the existence of one only Supreme Being, represented him either as a Deity wrapped within himself, and too great to condescend to pay attention to the things of this earth, or as a God without liberty; who, although he was the Lord over mankind, was governed by the decrees of what they called *Fate,* and on account of this subjection, could not prevent any action of man, or any occurrence in the world; all of which they supposed were predestinated so to be, and must happen of necessity. Jesus came to restore to his Father the glory which had been wrested from him by this pernicious error: he came to teach mankind that faith is the source of true wisdom, and that the sacrifice of reason is the first step to Christian philosophy. He came to remove every doubt respecting the nature of the Deity, and to teach us what was proper to be known concerning him, and what to remain unknown.

But, alas! where are the believers who make the entire sacrifice of their reason to faith, and bow down their heads in silent respect and adoration before the majestic veil of

religion? I speak not of the impious who say: *There is no God*: but I speak of the greater number of the faithful, whose ideas of the Divinity are as false and human as those formerly entertained by the pagan philosophers. This numerous class of adorers of the true God consider not the occurrences of life as ordained or permitted by his providence: they live as if either chance or the caprice of men were the cause of what happens on earth; they seem to think that *prosperity* and *adversity* are the two divinities which govern and preside over every thing that passes in the world. This is certainly the fact; for if they looked up to God as the great disposer of all human events, would they murmur and complain, would they indulge impatience and despondency, would they entertain the spirit of envy and revenge, when any thing happens contrary to their inclinations or interest? I speak, likewise, of those men who imagine, that the mysterious ways of God, in promoting our eternal welfare, ought to be laid open to the understanding; and finding that the powers of reason are too weak to fathom the secrets of his grace in operating the salvation of his elect, will not exclaim with the apostle: "O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God,"—*Rom.* xi, 33, but are tempted to believe that, either God does not concern himself about our salvation, or that it is to no purpose that we be concerned about it ourselves. I speak of those men who delight in the giddy circles of dissipation, who discover something plausible and convincing in the weakest and most senseless arguments which incredulity opposes to faith; who seem to wish that religion were false, and who are less affected by the weight of proofs, by which the swellings of our reason are repressed, and truth and immortality brought to light, than by a declamatory harangue, which proves nothing except the boldness of impiety and blasphemy.

Finally, I speak of many Christians who tacitly avow that the belief of the wonderful prodigies which religion has recorded, is calculated only for the ignorant and the simple; and who seem to think that the subversion of the order of nature, by the miraculous interposition of providence, is a work too great for the Almighty to effect, except on the most extraordinary occasions; and who refuse to acknowledge a continuation of miracles in a church which was founded on them, which glories in them as the peculiar and distinctive mark of her divine origin, and which is herself the greatest miracle.

These unhappy men wrest from God the glory which the birth of Jesus had insured to him. He taught us to captivate our reason to the belief of the incomprehensible mystery of

his manifestation in our flesh. He terminated the wanderings of the human mind, and withdrew it from the abyss of error, into which it had fallen under the guidance of human reason, and brought it to the paths of truth and life. We, nevertheless, refuse to submit to his authority, and even under the empire of faith, we desire to follow as formerly the standard of weak reason. Those mysteries of religion which are above our comprehension, stagger our belief: we wish to reform every thing: we have doubts about every thing: we imagine that God thinks like man. Without entirely renouncing our faith we destroy its influence. Hence our morality is vitiated, our vices are multiplied: the love of present things is enkindled in our hearts; the love of the good things to come is utterly lost and extinguished. Hatred and dissensions are diffused every where among the faithful, and the primitive traits of innocence, holiness, and charity, which in the first ages made religion appear amiable in the eyes even of those who refused to embrace it, are in danger of being effaced for ever from the minds of the greatest part of men. Let not this be said of all.

Let us, my beloved brethren, enter into the spirit of this solemnity. May Jesus be born again in our souls: may he take possession of his rights over us. We shall then, in union with his faithful followers, give to God the glory which in justice belongs to him; and he, in return, will admit us into a partnership of his glory in the kingdom of heaven.

VI.—SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS.

BENEFITS CONFERRED ON MAN BY THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David."—*Luke*, ii, 10 11.

Again, my beloved friends, your attention is summoned to the joyful tidings announced by the angels. A Saviour is born to us, who is Christ the Lord. His empire shall be extended, and there shall be no end of peace. (*Isa.*, ix, 7). By the completion of this wonderful mystery, "the seed of the woman has crushed the serpent's head,"—*Gen.*, iii, 15: "the hand-writing that was against us is reversed,"—*Col.*, ii, 16; the jaws of hell are closed, and the gates of heaven are thrown open to all who are seriously disposed to enter. The times foretold by the prophet are, in a spiritual sense, arrived:

"the wolf dwelleth with the lamb,"—*Isa.*, xi, 6 : the lawless passions of the mind are hushed, and the spirit of meekness resides undisturbed in the breast. "The calf, the lion, and the sheep live together, and a little child leadeth them."—*ibid.* Pride, ambition, and the lust of power—the haughty tyrants of the soul—have resigned their place to the more humble virtues of mildness and simplicity. Or, in another sense, the *lion*—the great and mighty ones of the earth—mix confusedly with the *calf and sheep*—the ignorant and the simple—in the fold of Christ ; and a *little child*—the humility and simplicity of the gospel—is the indiscriminate guide of them all. "The bear feeds with the calf, and their young ones lie down together: they do not hurt, neither do they kill, in all my holy mountain."—*Isa.*, xi, 7, 9. Hatred, animosity, and revenge are forgotten, and the spirit of brotherly love, and unlimited forgiveness of injuries, have dispelled the tumults of the breast, and diffused an universal peace. "The lion eats straw like the ox."—*ib.*, 7 : the love of sensual pleasures is renounced, and the evils which it entailed on mankind are no more. "The sucking child plays on the hole of the asp,"—*ib.*, 8 : innocence of mind has dispelled the terrors and alarms which haunt the imagination of the guilty, and the securest confidence and peace direct all their steps.

These mystic times, my beloved, are arrived. An universal peace is announced to us. But have we hitherto enjoyed this peace? It is indeed announced to all; but it is enjoyed only by men of good will. On this subject I will enlarge in the present discourse, hoping that the description of the benefits imparted by this happy peace will stimulate your endeavours to banish from your breasts the evils which have hitherto prevented your enjoyment of it.

1. An universal peace reigned over the universe when Jesus, "the Prince of peace"—*Isa.*, ix, 6, appeared on earth. All the nations subjected to the Roman empire peaceably endured the yoke of those haughty conquerors of the world. Rome herself, after the numberless dissensions which had depopulated her streets, and inundated Asia and Europe with the blood of her citizens, rested from the horrors of war, and, reduced under the authority of a Cæsar, found in her servitude that peace, which she never enjoyed in the days of her boasted liberty.

The universe was thus in a state of profound peace; but it was not the peace which was promised to men of good will. Notwithstanding the din of arms had ceased, mankind were addicted to the most violent and tormenting passions, and experienced within themselves wars and dissensions of the worst

description. Ignorant of their God, victims of the tumults and divisions of their own breasts, assaulted by the multiplicity and the incessant contrariety of their disordered inclinations, they were strangers to true peace. And no wonder; for they sought after this peace in the very source that gave rise to all their troubles and disquietudes.

Our Divine Redeemer descends on earth with full power to impart to man that happy peace which the world could not give. He comes to apply the proper remedy to the disorder. His divine philosophy is not confined to pompous precepts, which flatter the understanding without eradicating the evil; but as pride, self-love, hatred, and revenge, were the sources from whence proceeded the tumults of the heart of man, he comes to hush them into peace by his grace, his doctrine, and his example.

Yes, my beloved, pride was the primary source of the evils which were endured by the children of men. What wars, what devastations had this detestable passion occasioned in the world! With what torrents of blood had it deluged the universe! What was the history of all ages and states? What was the history of peoples and nations, of princes and conquerors? What was it but the history of the direful calamities which pride had poured forth on mankind? The whole world resembled a melancholy theatre, on which this restless and haughty passion daily exhibited the most shocking spectacles.

The external effects, however, of this vice were only a faint resemblance of the agitations which proud man experienced in his soul. Ambition was exalted to the rank of virtues; and indifference about honours and supereminence was treated as meanness of soul. A single man spread terror and devastation over a whole kingdom, overturned its laws and customs, and buried thousands in the abyss of poverty and distress, with no other object in view than the usurpation of the first place among the people. The success of his crimes excited admiration and respect: and his name, stained with the blood of his fellow-creatures, shone in the annals of history with superior lustre. Thus was a fortunate and bloody warrior considered the greatest man of his age.

This passion in the hearts of the multitude was equally furious and restless, although attended with less brilliant effects. The obscure man was not more tranquil than the man of dignity: each one contended for superiority above his equals; each one strove to satisfy the desires of pride; and, as these were insatiable, each one divested himself of the

possibility of enjoying either peace or tranquility. Thus was pride the source of honour and human glory; and thus likewise was it the fatal destroyer of the repose and happiness of mankind.

The birth of Christ exposes the fallacy of this error, and restores to the world the means of attaining true peace. He could have manifested himself to mankind decorated with all the splendour of wealth and power. He had a right to assume the pompous titles of Conqueror of Juda, Legislator of his people, Saviour of Israel. Jerusalem would have acknowledged him with those glorious distinctions. But Jerusalem had worldly glory only in view, whereas Jesus came to teach her that such glory was vain; that worldly pomp and grandeur were of no consideration in the eyes of God, and consequently ought to be of no consideration in the eyes of men; and that the oracles of the prophets foretold the coming of a Saviour, who was to redeem and sanctify the world, not by riches and honour and power, but by humility, ignominy, and suffering.

He therefore was born in Bethlehem, in a state of poverty and abjection; He, whose birth was celebrated by the canticles of all the heavenly choirs, was born without any external pomp; He, who was superior to principalities and powers, was not decorated with any title that could distinguish him in the eyes of men; He whose name was above all names, and who alone had power to inscribe the names of his elect in the great book of life, permitted his own name to be enrolled amongst the most obscure of the subjects of Cæsar. To him, only shepherds—simple and ignorant shepherds—pay their homage, although every thing that is in heaven, in hell, or on earth, was dependent on him. In a word, every thing that was calculated to confound human pride was exhibited at his humble birth.

Ah, my beloved, look at your Saviour! If titles, if rank, if prosperity and wealth, were calculated to make you happy here below, and give peace to your souls, Jesus would certainly have possessed them, and imparted the valuable gift to his favoured disciples. But he informs us by his example, that peace can be obtained only by despising them. He teaches us that happiness depends on repressing those desires which had hitherto been the only objects of our solicitude. He points out to us blessings of a more durable and substantial quality—blessings which alone are capable of satisfying our desires, of assuaging our pains—blessings which man cannot take from us, and which may be obtained by only loving and desiring them.

And yet, where is the man that enjoys this happy peace? Wars, tumults, and miseries are as common now as at any former period. Empires and states which adore the God of peace, are not more peaceable than idolatrous nations. Where will you find that peace among Christians which ought to be their inheritance? Will you find it in cities? No: pride reigns triumphant there; every one is actuated by pride; every one attempts to be greater than his forefathers; every one envies the good fortune of a neighbour who attains honour or wealth. Will you find it within the precincts of domestic retreat? Here you will discover that every enjoyment is embittered by solicitudes and cares: you will see the father incessantly busied and troubled, not so much about the Christian education, as about the temporal advancement of his children. These disquietudes and anxieties will accompany him to the grave; he will bequeath them to his children as an inheritance, and they in the same manner will hereafter transmit them to their descendants. Will you find it in the palaces of kings? Here likewise a boundless ambition corrodes every heart: here, under the specious appearances of festivity and joy, the most violent and destructive passions are matured: here happiness seems to reside; but, in reality, the victims which pride consigns to wretchedness and discontent are more numerous than elsewhere. Will you find it in the humble cottage? From hence, indeed, many of the more violent passions are removed, but peace is not admitted in their place. Petty animosities, disappointments, jealousies, the fear of coming to want, and numberless other evils, torment their souls: there is always some untoward accident, some disagreeable behaviour, or unkind treatment from a neighbour, that disturbs their peace; and even where no external evils exist, there is always something wanting to complete their comfort; they are not satisfied with exactly what they have, and consequently they enjoy not that peace which our Saviour came to impart to men of good will.

O blessed peace of my Jesus, which surpasseth all understanding, and which art the only remedy for the innumerable evils occasioned by pride, when wilt thou come and take full possession of our hearts?

2. To the calamities I have already described, were added others arising from a different, though not less malignant source: I mean, from the impure desires of the flesh. Man had forgotten the excellence of his nature and the sanctity of his origin, and had given himself up like the beasts to the impetuosity of that animal instinct. He concluded that, as this was the most violent and the most universal passion of

the human breast, it was on that account the most innocent and the most lawful. To give a still greater sanction to these lustful excesses, he made them a part of his religion, and formed to himself impure gods, in whose temples this impious vice became a part of their religious worship. Even a philosopher, who in other respects stands in the first rank amongst the pagan sages, fearing that marriage would put a restraint on that abominable passion, proposed the abolition of that sacred union, in order to introduce a promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, as it is with beasts, and to continue the succession of the human race by criminal means alone.

In proportion as this habit of dissoluteness was the prevailing distemper of the times, the appearance of its depravity seemed to be lost in the general corruption. But, my beloved friends, what a deluge of evils has it spread over the world! With what fury have we seen nations fighting against nations, kings against kings, brothers against brothers, spreading carnage and desolation on every side! These, in all probability, were for the most part judgments of God, which the multiplied commission of this vice drew down on the heads of the guilty. In the individual this vice became an inexhaustible source of troubles and remorse. It flattered the soul with the assurance of pleasure, and of calm, undisturbed enjoyment; but jealousy, suspicion, rage, excess, satiety, inconstancy, and melancholy attended its footsteps. So apparent, indeed, were these effects, that, although laws, religion, and universal example authorised it, the love alone of internal peace inspired a few prudent men, even in the ages of darkness and corruption, to fly from it with abhorrence.

This motive, however, was too weak to stem the general torrent, and extinguish in the hearts of men the impetuous violence of this passion. A more powerful remedy was necessary: and this remedy was the birth of a Saviour whose ministry would withdraw mankind from the deep abyss of corruption, would exalt to honour the heavenly virtues of purity and chastity, would disengage the unhappy victims of this vice from their disgraceful bonds, and would open the gates of peace, by restoring to them the liberty and innocence of which they had been deprived by their multiplied and abominable excesses.

Jesus was born of a virgin, the most pure of all creatures. This circumstance alone was a distinguishing encomium on a virtue to which the world had hitherto been strangers—a virtue which was deemed a reproach even by his own people. But, in addition to this, by taking upon himself our nature,

he has incorporated himself as it were with us: we are become members of his mystical body, and we are destined to sit with him on the right hand of the living God, and to glorify him for all eternity.

Exalted, then, dear Christians, is the degree of honour to which our flesh is raised by this mystery. It is made the temple of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the portion of a body in which the plenitude of the Divinity resides, the object of the complacency and love of the Father. What a dignity! What an honour! But do we not still continue to defile this temple? Do we not enslave to iniquity those members of Jesus Christ? Do we respect our flesh the more because it is made a sacred portion of the mystical body of our Lord? Ah! this detestable passion exercises the same tyranny over Christians, who are the children of liberty, light, and holiness, as it formerly exercised over the children of darkness. The havoc it makes in all ranks and conditions is too well known to require description. It is the most universal passion, the most favoured passion. The loss of health, of peace, of content, of happiness, are insufficient motives to arrest its progress. The justice of God, the goodness and love of God, the hopes of heaven, the remorse of conscience, the fears of hell, are considerations too weak to resist its attacks. Oh! if you are solicitous to enjoy that peace which our Saviour purchased on this day for mankind, banish the impure spirit from your hearts; follow the paths of innocence, and you will experience a tranquillity and happiness which is unknown to the children of lust.

3. Lastly, the birth of Jesus reconciles the world to his Father; it unites together the Jew and the Gentile; it abolishes the odious distinction of Greek and Barbarian; it extinguishes hatreds and enmities; of all nations it makes but one people; of all disciples but one heart and one soul. Formerly, mankind were united together by no common band of amity and union. The diversity of religions, of manners, of country, of language, and interest, had, in some degree, diversified in them the same common nature. They exterminated each other like wild beasts; they placed their glory in slaughtering their fellow-creatures, and carrying their bleeding heads in triumph as trophies of their victory. It seemed as if they had received their existence from distinct and irreconcileable creators, who had placed them here below for no other purpose than to espouse their quarrel, and terminate the contest by the total extinction of one of the parties.

Jesus, therefore, is come to be our peace, our reconciliation, the corner stone to support and compact the whole edifice;

the living head, to direct all the members, and form all mankind into one body. Everything tends to unite us to him, and everything that unites us to him, unites and reconciles us to each other. We are all animated by the same spirit, the same hope is our common consolation, and we partake of the same divine food. We are enclosed in the same sheepfold, and are led to pasture by the same shepherd. We are the children of the same father, heirs of the same promise, citizens of the same eternal city, and members of the same body.

These are sacred bonds indeed. But, my beloved, have they hitherto been sufficient to unite us together in peace? Far otherwise. Christianity, which ought to unite all hearts, which ought to be the connecting link of the faithful among themselves, and of Jesus with them—Christianity, which ought to reflect the image of the peace which reigns above—Christianity itself is a scene of carnage and devastation. Whilst the idolater and the pagan are reposing under their fig-trees in the arms of peace, the inheritors of the promise, the children of peace, are advancing against each other with fire and sword. Ambition stimulates the rulers to begin the contest; and a false glory inspires the combatants to drench their swords in the blood of their fellow Christians.

This is not all: even within the precincts of towns and families, the hearts and affections of men are as little united, as between kingdoms. Animosities are perpetuated between families; dissensions are fostered in cities; injuries and affronts are everywhere revenged; and reconciliations and sincere forgiveness are extraordinary events; detraction, backbiting, and slander infect every company, and enter into every conversation; self-interest is the motive of every action; and the humiliations and sufferings of a neighbour are matters of indifference, provided they do not operate as obstacles to our own advancement. This is the unhappy state of the Christian world.

Thus, my friends, you see that Jesus has descended on earth in vain. He came to bring us peace: he bequeathed it to us for our inheritance: his favourite injunction was mutual forgiveness and love. But, alas! peace and union and brotherly love are banished from amongst us. Religion, which endows an enemy with the endearing qualities of a brother, is no longer attended to: the menace of experiencing from the hand of God the same severity with which we treat our offending brethren, has no effect on our minds; and in defiance of every consideration, hatred and dislike retain possession of our hearts. We live on in this state without fear or apprehension: the imaginary justice of our cause calms our conscience,

and shuts our eyes to the injustice and criminality of our hatred and aversion: and if, at the point of death, we form a reconciliation, or publicly declare before our surrounding attendants that we forgive them, the motive that actuates us is, not that we love them as we love ourselves, but either that the power of perpetuating our hatred is about to be taken from us, or that we shudder at the idea of appearing before the tribunal of God with a conscience avowedly defiled with gall and bitterness.

Let us, my dearly beloved, throw ourselves into the arms of our infant Jesus: let us enter into the spirit of this mystery: let us give to God the glory which belongs to him. This is the only means of regaining the peace of which our passions have deprived us, and of acquiring a title to the peace which is prepared for us in the world to come.

VII.—THE CIRCUMCISION.

DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

"His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel."—*Luke*, ii, 21.

How is reason astonished and confounded at the sight of a God assuming the form of a creature! and into what a labyrinth of errors would it not have precipitated itself, had not the light of faith disclosed the depth of the divine wisdom, which is concealed under the supposed folly of a God-man!

It may, perhaps, be deemed superfluous to enter on this subject before a Christian auditory, whose eyes have been always open to this heavenly light, and to combat arguments against the divinity of Christ, which none of you have ever maintained. It undoubtedly would, if I had no other motive than that of enforcing conviction. But there are other motives which render the discussion necessary, and in some degree obligatory on the part of the pastor. The spirit of infidelity is making most alarming progress. The Unitarian and Deist have risen up in opposition to the Christ, the Holy One: and although your faith is now firm and unshaken, it is not impossible but that their captious arguments may insensibly produce an unfavourable effect on your minds. It is the duty, therefore, of the pastor to guard you against this danger, and to supply you with proper arguments, should their blasphemous tenets be broached in your presence. It is likewise of the greatest utility sometimes to unveil the sanctuary, and display the hidden beauties which religion proposes for your respect

and homage: sometimes to console your piety, by recounting the wonders of Him, who is the Author and Finisher of your faith; and to animate your fervour, by exhibiting to you the glory and divinity of the Mediator, who is the object of your hope and consolation.

That Christ is God, I will prove from his ministry: and that he is descended from heaven, and is equal to the Father, I will demonstrate from the object of his mission.

The subject is too extensive to allow me to discuss every point. I must omit the pompous oracles by which he was foretold, and the wonderful works which he performed in person: these I must omit, and confine myself to the spirit of his ministry, namely, to his doctrine, his benefits, and his promises. The first shall form the subject of this discourse, and the others I will reserve for a future occasion.

1. The Almighty manifested himself to creatures for the purpose of imparting to them the inestimable knowledge of his divinity, and of instructing them in the duties which they owed to him as their Lord and Maker. Religion, therefore, properly speaking, is the divine light which displays God to man, and regulates the duties of man to God. Whether the Most High disclosed these truths to mankind in person, or by the ministry of some extraordinary personage invested with the power of the Holy Spirit, his object in view was the knowledge and sanctification of his name in the world, and the establishment of a religion, by which might be given to him alone what to him alone was due.

This incontestible truth being acknowledged, I say, that if our Lord Jesus, who came in the fulness of time, be not God, but a mere creature selected by God to be his envoy on earth, he has acted in direct opposition to the intentions of his Great Employer: he has made the world idolaters: he has wrested from the Deity the glory which is due to him alone, and arrogated it to himself. Or rather, if we consider the ministry, the doctrine, the benefits, and the promises of Jesus, we must declare that God himself, who sent him on earth vested with such unlimited power and glory, has deceived us, and that he alone is the cause of the idolatry of those who adore him.

But, my beloved, who will dare to impute to God such a crime? It is, therefore, an inevitable consequence, that if Jesus Christ be holy, he must be likewise God; and, if his ministry be not the ministry of error and imposture, it must be the ministry of eternal truth itself, manifested for our instruction.

The enemies of his divinity are ready to acknowledge that

he was a holy and just man: and, although there have been some of late years who have blasphemed against his innocence, and have dared to rank him amongst seducers, their names are held in abhorrence, and their memory is deserving of the detestation of all who have ever confessed the name of Christ.

In effect, what man ever appeared on earth decorated with such indubitable marks of innocence and sanctity? In what philosopher was ever discovered such a love for virtue, such a sincere contempt for the world, such charity for mankind, such an indifference to human glory, such interest for the glory of the Supreme Being, such an elevation above all that the world admires and seeks after? How ardent was his zeal for the salvation of men! To this object were referred his discourses, his cares, his desires, his solicitudes. The wise men of old exercised their genius, and acquired a reputation by exposing the weakness and follies of their fellow-creatures: Jesus speaks of their vices only for the purpose of prescribing remedies. The philosophers took occasion of pride from discovering vices in others from which they themselves were not exempt: Jesus, with a heart melting with compassion, points out faults in others, of which he himself was innocent; and sheds tears over the immoralities of a faithless and ungrateful city. The object of the philosophers was not so much the reformation of the morals of men, as the desire of acquiring a great name by the superiority of their talents and wisdom: Jesus seeks only to save lost man, and, in the pursuit of this object is as insensible to the calumnies and persecution of his enemies, as he is to the applause and commendation of his admirers.

Enter into the whole detail of his moral conduct, and tell me whether there ever appeared on earth a just man more universally exempt from weaknesses the most inseparable from human nature? The more you scrutinize, the more incontrovertible will his sanctity appear. The disciples, who were the most intimately acquainted with his conduct, were the most astonished at the innocence of his life: and familiarity, which discovers faults in the most heroic virtue, contributed only to the more perfect knowledge of his perfections. On all occasions he speaks the language of Heaven; and all his replies are calculated to promote the salvation of those who question him. Never does he exhibit symptoms of mental weakness: he always appears in the quality of Ambassador of the Most High. In him, the most common actions are rendered extraordinary by the novelty and sublimity of the dispositions with which he performs them. He appears

no less divine when he eats with a Pharisee, than when he raises Lazarus to life.

Truly, my brethren, mere human nature is not susceptible of such sublimity: nor can it so perfectly divest itself of the weakness to which it is constitutionally liable. He does not dazzle the understanding by the display of eloquence and sophistry, like the philosophers; but, like a truly just man, he draws the rules and precepts of his doctrine from his own conduct. What greater proofs of his sanctity could be given, than that the traitor himself, whose interest it was to exculpate himself by exposing his master's defects, should give public testimony in his favour; and that the malice of his most declared enemies should not be able to accuse him of any crime? (*John*, viii, 46.)

Jesus Christ, therefore, being holy, he must consequently be God; otherwise, the doctrine which he taught, as well respecting his Father, as respecting the duties of man, would be no more than equivocations, calculated to lead mankind into the grossest errors.

2. Now, what was his doctrine respecting the Father? Moses and the prophets incessantly proclaimed that the Lord was the One Great All; that it was an impiety to debase him by a comparison with any of his creatures; that they themselves were his servants and envoys, humble instruments in the performance of the wonders which he wrought by their ministry. Not a doubtful expression escaped them respecting this most essential point of their mission: no comparison between themselves and the Supreme Being; no equivocal term, which could give rise to superstition and idolatry, by inducing the people to believe they were equal to the God in whose name they spoke.

If Jesus Christ were like them, a messenger sent from God, and nothing more, it was certainly incumbent on him to fulfil his ministry with equal fidelity. But what is his language? He proclaims himself equal to the Father (*Matt.*, xi, 27): he says, that he is descended from Heaven (*John*, vi, 51); that he proceeds from the bosom of God (*John*, xvi, 28); that eternal life depends on knowing the Son, as well as on knowing the Father (*John*, xvii, 3); that he was before Abraham (*John*, viii, 58); that he was before all things (*John*, xvii, 5); that he and the Father are one (*John*, x, 30); and that whatever is done by the Father, is done by the Son likewise (*John*, v, 19).

What prophet, except Christ, ever held such extraordinary language? Who, except Jesus, ever attributed to his own strength the great wonders which the Lord wrought by his

ministry? How consoling is it, my beloved, to behold the certitude on which our faith is founded! Jesus on all occasions places himself on a level with the Deity. Once, indeed, he says, that the Father is greater than him: but what would this mean, were he not himself a God incarnate? What man of sense would dare to insult our understanding, by seriously asserting that the Supreme Being was greater than he? Are we not all sensible that there is no proportion between God and man?—between the great ALL, and created nothing? Jesus, however, does not content himself with asserting that he is equal to God, but he justifies the novelty of his expressions, in opposition to the murmurs of the Jews, who were scandalized: and so far from undeceiving, he confirms them in their scandal; he everywhere speaks a language, which would be either senseless or impious, if his divinity were not admitted to explain and justify it.

My friends, would the pious, the meek, the humble Jesus have acted thus if he were not God? Paul and Barnabas rent their garments when they were taken for gods: they proclaimed aloud before the people, who were preparing to offer sacrifices to them, that they were nothing more than mortal men; and that God alone ought to be adored, of whom they were only the envoys and ministers (*Acts*, xiv, 14). The angel in the *Apocalypse* rejected the adoration of St. John with horror, and with a loud voice commanded him "to adore God alone"—*Apoc.*, xix. 10. But Jesus Christ unresistingly permits divine honours to be paid to him: he applauds the faith of his disciples, when they adore, and call with St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God"—*John*, xx. 28: he even confounds his enemies, when they dispute his divinity, and deny his eternal origin (*John*, viii.) And can it be supposed that Jesus was less zealous for the glory of Him that sent him, than his disciples were? Or was it less incumbent on him than on them, plainly to undeceive the people of a mistake so injurious to the Supreme Being, and by which the whole fruit of his ministry would be destroyed?

Ah! what benefit has Jesus conferred on the world, if he be not God? Has he not plunged mankind deeper into the abyss of idolatry? For by whom is he not adored as the eternal Son of the Father, the image of his substance, and the splendour of his glory? A small number only of men have existed amongst Christians, who received him merely as the envoy of God, and refused him divine honours. This impious sect, which has acquired the name of *Unitarian*, consists only of a few obscure disciples, whose doctrine is held in detestation, and anathematised by the whole Christian

world. Recal to mind, the great promises which were so pompously announced to mankind, and tell me whether the small, the obscure society of Unitarians can be that great people of every tongue, of every tribe, and of every nation, of which the Church of Jesus was to be formed? Where would then be that superabundance of grace, that plenitude of the Holy Spirit, which was to be spread over all flesh? Where would be that universal renovation, which the prophets foretold with such solemnity, and which was to accompany the birth of the Great Deliverer? Are the great advantages which the world was to acquire by the ministry of Jesus, confined within such contracted limits? Did the oracles of the prophets concerning the future magnificence of the Gospel, mean nothing more than the formation of the sect of an impious Socinus?

My God! how wise, how reasonable does the faith of thy Church appear, when put in opposition to the senseless contradictions of incredulity! How consoling is it to believe and hope in Jesus, when we behold the abyss which pride opens for itself, by preaching new doctrines, and sapping the foundation of the faith and hope of Christians!

Thus, dear brethren, you see that the doctrine of Jesus in respect to the Father proves the reality of his eternal origin. When the prophets spoke of the great God of heaven and earth, they could not find words to express the grandeur and magnificence of their ideas. Lost in the contemplation of the immensity, the omnipotence, and the majesty of the Supreme Being, they exhausted the weakness of human language in describing the sublimity of their conceptions. This God, they said, is he who measures the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand! who weighs the mountains in his balance, (*Isa.*, xl, 12): who speaks the word, and it is done (*Ps.*, xxxii, 9). Thus they spoke; and it was fit that mortal man should speak of the eternal God in this manner. But when Jesus speaks of the glory of the Lord, he adopts not the pompous descriptions of the prophets: on the contrary, the most tender, the most simple expressions are his choice. He calls him a holy Father—a just and clement Father—a shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and placing it on his shoulders to carry it back to the fold (*Luke*, xv, 4, 5)—a father of a family, moved to compassion by the return and repentance of his prodigal child (*Luke*, xv). This is the language of a *Son*. The freedom and simplicity of his expressions manifestly prove that he is acquainted with the secrets of Heaven, and that the majesty and glory of the Divinity are familiar to him.

This affectionate language of Jesus implies a severe condemnation of the sentiments of the greater number of Christians. We know that we are now no longer servants, but brethren and coheirs with Jesus Christ; that we have acquired the right of calling God our Father, and ourselves his children. From this knowledge we learn that love, not fear, is to regulate our obedience. But, my beloved, in what manner do we avail ourselves of this glorious privilege? By what are we influenced? Ah! too true it is, that we serve him more like hirelings and slaves, than like children. We obey him, not because we are affected by his promises and love, but because we dread his judgments. His law, so holy and just, appears not amiable in our eyes: on the contrary, like a yoke it weighs heavy on our shoulders; it excites our complaints; and, if no punishment awaited our transgressions, we should soon shake it off, and rejoice at our happy deliverance. We murmur incessantly against the severity of his precepts; and we employ every argument in order to justify the relaxations which the world has introduced. Thus, we may conclude that, if he were not an avenging God, we should renounce our allegiance to him, and that the little homage and respect we pay to him is extorted by the terrors of his justice and indignation.

3. We will now proceed to the proofs of his divinity which are deducible from his doctrine and instructions. It is not my intention to enlarge on the wisdom, the sanctity, the sublimity of this doctrine: I will only remark, that the whole does honour to reason and to the soundest philosophy: that the whole is proportioned to the weakness and to the excellency of man—to his wants and to his high destiny; that the whole inspires a contempt for perishable things, and a love for the good things of eternity: that the whole is calculated to maintain order and tranquillity in the world: that the whole is grand, because the whole is true. The wise man of the Gospel is excited to the performance of good actions by the only satisfaction of obeying God, who will be his reward exceeding great; and he is taught to prefer the testimony of a good conscience before the applauses of men: he is superior to the whole world by the liveliness of his faith; and he is inferior to the last of men in his modest opinion of himself. Glory in his eyes is fallacious; prosperity is replete with dangers; afflictions are blessings; the earth is a place of banishment; and all that passes with time is no more than a dream.

What man, before Christ, ever delivered such doctrine? And if his disciples, who only announced his precepts, were

taken for gods descended on earth (*Acts*, xiv, 10), what ought to be our opinion of him who was the author of them?

But we will pass over these general reflections, and proceed to the more precise testimonies of love and dependence which he requires should be paid to him, as well as to the Father. He commands us to love him in the same manner as he loved the Father (*John*, xv, 10), to refer all our actions, our thoughts, our desires, and even our whole selves to his glory, in the same manner as to the Father (*Matt.*, x, *et alibi*); he even declares that sins are remitted only in proportion as we love him (*Luke*, vii, 47). What prophet, before Christ, ever said to mankind; You shall love me in the same degree as you love the Father; everything that you do, you shall do for my glory.

But this is not all that he requires. It is his command, not only that we love him, but that we give testimonies of the most generous, the most heroic love: that we love him more than we love our relations, our friends, our goods, our life, more than the whole world, more even than we love our own souls (*Luke*, xiv, 26). He declares that the Christian who is not so disposed, is not worthy of him; and that he who places him on a level with creatures, or even with himself, dishonours and injures him, and shall never partake of his promises.

My friends, who but a God could impose such commands? Life is the gift of the Most High; and who, but the Most High, can exact the sacrifice of it? Jesus, however, commands us to suffer tortures and death for his name, and with the authority of a God declares, that if we renounce him before men, although it be to avoid the greatest evils, he will renounce us before his Father (*Matt.*, x, 33). Ah! if the hand of God were not with him, if he were not the Word made flesh, can it be supposed that people could have existed on earth so devoid of every natural feeling, so deaf to the tender calls of self-preservation, as to run with ecstasies of delight into the very jaws of destruction in support of such a doctrine? Can it be supposed that innumerable multitudes of every age, condition, sex, would have foregone the sweetest pleasures of human nature, and have lingered out a miserable existence in caverns, in nakedness, and in want, in hourly expectation of being dragged to the torture and to martyrdom, rather than renounce their belief in the divinity of Jesus the Son of God? Can it be supposed that such a doctrine, had it been erroneous, could have triumphed over the universe, confounded all sects, united all hearts, and have been acknowledged by the wisest men to be superior to all

science, wisdom, and doctrine, that ever appeared on earth? No: the ear of rational man cannot listen to such suppositions; it turns from them with abhorrence.

How consoling, my beloved, is it to see the veil of the sanctuary withdrawn, and to behold the stability of the foundation on which our faith and hope are founded!

One reflection shall conclude this discourse. Since we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, it is our indispensable duty to follow his doctrine. This doctrine requires that we sacrifice to him our will, our friends, our relations, our property, our lives, and every other thing that impedes our progress in the paths of salvation. Faith teaches us that he will make us ample amends for all that we relinquish for his sake; or rather, that he will give us himself, the greatest of all treasures, the most exquisite of all rewards. Let us, therefore, confess Christ, by acknowledging that he is greater than the world, that he is more able to make us happy, and, consequently, more worthy of being loved: let us confess him in this manner both in word and deed, and then we may rest assured that he will confess us before his Father, and unite us to the happy society of his elect in the kingdom of Heaven.

VIII.—SUNDAY BEFORE THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

"His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel."—*Luke*, ii. 21.

This, my beloved, is the sacred name given to the great Messiah—the Saviour of the human race: this is the name which God himself hath chosen for his only Son: this is the name, at the sound of which every knee shall bend, of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and in hell (*Phil.*, ii, 10). This sacred name you all revere; and from your infancy you have confessed that Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father (*Phil.*, ii, 11). Jesus, the Son of God, has always been the object of your adoration, the Author and Finisher of your faith (*Heb.*, xii, 2), and the completion of your hope even to the end (*Heb.*, vi, 11). In him have been centred all your desires, all your expectations. From him you have sought consolation in distress, refreshment in labour, patience in sufferings, and joy in afflictions. From his bountiful hand you acknowledge that you have received all the blessings and comforts of your life: and that your crosses and adversities

have proceeded from no other source than his merciful justice. Your morning sighs have been all wafted before his throne; and your evening lamentations have been poured forth at the foot of his cross. His sacred wounds have preserved you from the horrors of despair; and his austere doctrine and example have repressed in your bosom the pleasing, but delusive dreams of presumption. In him, and for him, you have lived and moved, and in his embraces and through his merits you continue to look forward with joyful hope to a blissful immortality. In a word, you have always considered Jesus as truly God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, made man for your redemption. These are your grounded sentiments. This has always been your creed.

If, therefore, I pursue the subject of my last discourse, let it not be supposed that I am actuated by the senseless desire of convincing you of a truth, of which I acknowledge you are already convinced; or that I undertake to resolve doubts, which I know have never existed in your minds. No; the real motive which induces me to lay before you the arguments in proof of the divinity of Jesus, is no other than the desire of consoling your faith, of displaying before your eyes the great blessings which are insured to you by the incarnation of a God, and of arming you against the insidious and sophistical arguments of modern infidelity.

In my discourse on the late festival, I deduced my proofs from the doctrine of Jesus; I will now apply to another source, namely, the *benefits* which Jesus conferred on mankind by his personal ministry on earth, and the *magnificent promises* which he held out of still greater blessings after his ascension into Heaven.

1. The benefits which Jesus was appointed to impart to the world form one of the most incontrovertible proofs of his divinity. He was sent to deliver men from eternal death: he was sent to blot out the hand-writing that was against them, to reverse the sentence of malediction, and to make them children of God: he was sent to open for them the gates of Heaven, and to admit them into a partnership of glory with the angels in the bosom of the Divinity. These ineffable gifts he was to dispense, not to one generation only, but to every succeeding generation to the end of the world. We, as well as our forefathers, are to find in him the remedy for all our evils: his sacred body is to be our food, and the application of his precious blood is to wash away all our defilements, and to restore peace and innocence to our souls. It is he who continues to appoint and consecrate pastors for our guidance in the paths of virtue: it is he who inspires teachers, by whose

ministry we are instructed in the secrets of salvation: it is he who raises up, from time to time, living models of perfection, whose example is intended to animate us to fight with determined resolution against our spiritual enemies. He is always present with us (*Matt.*, xxviii, 20), for our comfort and support in this place of banishment: he is our way, our truth, and our life (*John*, xiv, 6): he is our justification, our redemption, and our light (*John*, viii, 12). This is the doctrine of the scriptures respecting the Messiah.

Now, my beloved brethren, would it have been consistent with the wisdom of God to have conferred such power, such authority on any being that was merely human? Would his jealousy have permitted that a mortal man should be the author and the source of so many gifts and graces, and that he should assume a character of such independence and self-existence? Would not his omniscience have foreseen that the great Messiah, so far from effecting the redemption of the world, would plunge it deeper into the horrors of idolatry, and shut up every remaining avenue to the light of Heaven? Yes, my beloved! God foresaw all this; he knew that man would prostrate himself, and pay divine honours to the authors of such inestimable blessings: he, therefore, sent his only Word, the second Person of the adorable Trinity.

There are many, I presume, of my present hearers, who have but an imperfect idea of the nature and the extent of paganism. For their instruction, therefore, it will not be foreign to my subject to state, that, before the coming of Christ, the greater part of mankind were ignorant of the true God. The voice of nature loudly proclaimed to all, that there existed a Supreme Being: but what this Supreme Being was, human nature, unassisted by revelation, could not discover. The secrets of heaven were involved in impenetrable darkness, and man was left to follow the dictates of his own mind. He knew that he himself was dependent, and that submission was due to him on whom he depended. From this great Being he knew must be derived whatever might befal him ultimately of good or evil, and he rightly supposed that gratitude for the past was the only way of insuring the continuance of a favourable interposition in future, and of averting the calamities which he imagined would otherwise be his unhappy portion. When, therefore, he perceived that any visible thing, whether inanimate, animate, or human, was the channel through which great blessings were conveyed to him, he concluded that the Deity assumed that shape in order to communicate his gifts: hence, by a natural transition, he represented and adored him under that shape. It was this that induced some nations to

adore the sun; others, the moon and stars; others, the earth from which they received their nourishment; others, the cow, the ass, the dog. Others supposed that great and good princes and the inventors of useful arts were gods, and for this reason adored Jupiter, Hercules, Cybele, Vulcan, Mars, Mercury, &c. In a word, during those dark times of ignorance and blindness, man seemed to sigh after the knowledge of the true God; and, even while the Author of his existence was unknown to him, he did not forget the sentiments of gratitude and dependence which the voice of nature suggested towards him. Thus we see that the origin of the false gods of idolatry was gratitude on the part of man; and that his ignorance of the true and living God was the only reason why he did not worship him.

From this short account, my argument to you is simply as follows. No man ever conferred such inestimable blessings on mankind as Jesus. He has purchased for us an eternal peace: he has imparted to us happiness, justice, and truth: he has renewed the face of the whole earth: his favours are not confined to one people or to one generation: they are extended to every nation and to every age; and, what is more, these inestimable blessings he purchased for us at no less a price than that of his precious blood. If, therefore, gratitude exalted the mere instruments of the mercies of God to the rank of divinities, surely no one was more entitled to that distinction than Jesus. Ah! my beloved, if Jesus be no more than man, could God have seriously intended to redeem the world, at the time that he exposed it to the most imminent danger of idolatry?

If, indeed, Jesus had admonished his disciples before his death that they were indebted to the great God alone for so many benefits; that he himself was not the author and source, but only the minister employed for the distribution of these graces; that no extraordinary honours were due to him, but that the glory and honour and gratitude were due to God alone; then I allow, there would have been no danger of our falling into error. But Christ does not terminate his prodigies and ministry by any such admonitions. On the contrary, he not only commands his disciples to remember him, and even place their hopes in him after his decease; but at the moment that he is about to take his final leave, he declares that he will be present with them all days, even to the consummation of the world (*Matt.*, xxviii, 20), he promises them greater blessings than any he had hitherto imparted, and unites them to him still more strongly by indissoluble and eternal bands.

2. Reflect an instant, my beloved, on the wonderful promises which he made to his disciples, and you will see that they portend greater blessings than any that he had imparted to them during his mortal existence.

In the first place, he promises that he will send to them the Paraclete, the Comforter, whom he calls the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive (*John*, xiv); the Spirit of fortitude, which would animate his followers to suffer martyrdom for his sake; the Spirit of understanding, which had enlightened the prophets; the Spirit of wisdom, which would lead his Church into all truth; the Spirit of peace and charity, which would unite all hearts, and establish the bands of fraternal love between all the faithful. What a promise was this! Could man pretend to dispose of the Spirit of God, unless he himself likewise were God, and the spirit were his Spirit? The promise, however, is immediately fulfilled. No sooner is Jesus ascended into heaven than the Spirit of God descends on his disciples. Simple and ignorant men in an instant acquire a wisdom that is superior to the wisdom of the wisest of men: the weak display a courage that is proof against all the tortures of the most cruel tyrants. New men animated with a new spirit, appear on earth: they draw all people after them: they change the face of the whole universe.

In the second place, Jesus promises to his disciples the power of remitting sins, of opening the gates of heaven to the just man, and of shutting them against the sinner. Surely, my brethren, this is the work of Omnipotence itself. Who but God can forgive sins? And who but God can give power to weak man to exert such authority? But this is not all. He promises to his disciples the gift of miracles, the power of raising the dead to life, of giving sight to the blind, health to the sick, speech to the dumb, and of exercising an unlimited command over nature. This promise likewise is immediately fulfilled. The disciples wrought every wonder which he had enumerated; and they wrought them, not in the name of the Father, but in the name of Jesus who was crucified.

To all these promises he adds another of still greater magnitude. He assures them that the conversion of the world and the complete triumph of the cross shall be effected by their preaching: he declares that at his name the knee shall bend of all that are great or proudly eminent on earth; and that his Gospel shall be received by the whole universe. Pause a while, my brethren, and consider the extent of this promise. Who but a God can exercise dominion over the hearts of all mankind, and foretel that an universal change of

sentiment would take place—a change of which no example had ever before been known? The unbeliever, perhaps, may say, that this great event was revealed to him by God, after the same manner as future events were revealed to the prophets. But no; for if he is no God, he certainly is no prophet. The truth of his predictions rests entirely on the truth of his divinity. He foretold that all people sitting in the shades of death would open their eyes to the light: this prediction is false, if he be not God; for the people from the beginning made him the object of their adoration, and thus fell into a more criminal darkness. He foretold that his Father would be glorified, and that his Gospel would form a society of believers out of every nation and tongue, who would adore him in spirit and truth: this prediction, likewise, is false; for the whole Christian world have dishonoured the Father by prostituting their adoration to the prophet, and will continue to dishonour him even to the end. He foretold that the idols would be thrown down: and ought he not to have foreseen that he himself would be exalted in their stead? He foretold that he would form a holy people out of every tribe and nation under the sun; but if he were a prophet, and nothing more than a prophet, ought he not to have foreseen that, by his coming, he would only form a new sect of idolaters? Ought he not to have foreseen that the innumerable multitudes in every age, who would be converted by the preaching and miracles of his disciples, would place *him* on the throne of the living God; would refer all their actions and their homages to *him;* would have *his* glory continually in view; would wish to live only in *him* and for *him;* would depend on *him* alone; would look up to *him* for power, strength, and motion; in a word, would adore and love *him* more spiritually, more universally, and more intimately, than the pagans ever adored and loved their idols? Ah! my beloved, if Jesus be not God, he is not even a prophet: and if he be no prophet, he is deserving of all the opprobrious epithets which have been lavished on him by the worst of those who are, or who ever were, in the list of his opponents.

These are the extremes to which incredulity leads its unhappy votaries. If you destroy the foundation, or remove the corner-stone, which is Jesus Christ the eternal Son of the living God, the whole edifice falls to the ground. If you reject the doctrine of a God made man, you deprive faith of its merit, hope of its consolation, and charity of its motives. The first disciples clearly foresaw all these dismal consequences; and therefore they exerted every power of eloquence against the impious wretches who dared to call in question

the divinity of their Master. They knew that the doctrine of an Ebion and Cerinthus tended to destroy the very spirit of their religion, to deprive them of their only consolation under persecutions and sufferings, to do away their assurance of a future recompense, and in the end to reduce their exalted pretensions to a mere nothing. They knew that, if this grand article of their belief—namely, the divinity of Jesus—were rejected, their religion would be vain, and that it would be no more than a human doctrine; the work of a man, who, like other founders of sects, would have left no other inheritance to his disciples than the honour of being distinguished by his name.

So great was their zeal in defence of this doctrine, that the pagans themselves made it the subject of their reproaches. Pliny, a Roman proconsul and a celebrated writer (*Plin., Ep.* i, 1), in an account which he transmitted to the Emperor Trajan concerning the morals and doctrine of Christians, readily allows that they were just, innocent, and upright men; that they assembled together before sunrise, not to form plans of depredation or of civil commotion, but for the purpose of living piously and justly, of exciting each other to mutual detestation of frauds, adulteries, and desires of other men's goods. The only pretended fault of which he accuses them is, that they sung hymns and canticles in honour of Jesus Christ, and paid to him the same homage as to God himself.

If the first Christians had not given divine honour to Jesus Christ, they would undoubtedly have refuted this calumny: they would have removed from their religion every appearance of the kind: they would have discontinued a practice which they knew to be the greatest, if not the only circumstance, that could operate as a scandal to the Jews, and a stumbling-block to the Gentiles; they would have proclaimed aloud: "We do not adore Jesus Christ; far be it from us to give to creatures the honour which is due to God alone." But they were silent; they did not attempt to exculpate themselves. Their apologists refuted every other calumny which the pagans had thrown upon their doctrine; they justified themselves on every other point; they explained, they refuted the most trivial accusations, and by their public addresses delivered to the senate, imposed silence on all their other enemies. But they say nothing respecting their idolatry towards the person of Christ; they are not moved by the reproach of adoring a crucified man, a reproach which must have been most severely felt by men who were so holy, such declared enemies of idolatry, and so jealous of the glory of God. They not only do not vindicate themselves, but they justify the

accusation by their silence. But why do I say, *by their silence?* They publicly declare their belief by the most unequivocal testimonies; they suffer for his name; they die for his name; they confess him before tyrants and persecutors; they expire with joy on racks and gibbets, in the consoling expectation of being hereafter united to him, and of receiving from him a life of greater glory and happiness than the one which they sacrificed for his name. When these truly virtuous men were required to bend their knees before the statues of Cæsar, when even, out of a mistaken compassion, their friends proposed to give false testimony before the magistrates, asserting that they had offered sacrifice to idols, they declared that they were ready to suffer every species of torture and death rather than commit or mislead the people into a supposition that they had committed such a crime. And shall it be believed that men like these would have suffered themselves to be accused of paying divine honours to Jesus without endeavouring to refute the calumny? Let the enemies of our religion fancy what they will, not a corner of the universe, I am very sure, but would have resounded with their protests and protestations against the infamy of so detestable a charge. No torment can be thought of, no sort of death, in any of its most formidable shapes and frightful appearances, can be imagined, to which they would not most willingly have exposed themselves rather than give occasion to so odious, so execrable a suspicion.

What can incredulity oppose to this? Yes, my beloved, it is an incontrovertible truth, that the belief in the divinity of Jesus began with the Church, that it raised the whole edifice of Christianity, that it formed the whole host of martyrs, and that it renewed the face of the universe.

Now that I have displayed the proofs of this great principle of our religion before your eyes, I will conclude with this only reflection. Jesus Christ being the grand object of the piety of Christians, it is the indispensable duty of every one of you to be familiar with his doctrine, and obedient to his precepts. You ought to meditate frequently and attentively on his holy law, to have recourse to him in all your necessities, to nourish your souls with his holy sacraments, and to place your whole reliance on the merits of his death and passion. This is clean religion; this is knowing Jesus; this is simple and sincere piety; nothing is firm and solid but what is built on this foundation.

Reflect, therefore, dear Christians, that the principal homage which Jesus requires of you is, that you be like unto him, and that his life be the model of yours; and be assured that,

if you be thus conformable to his likeness in this life, you will be of the number of those who are to be partakers of his glory in the next.

IX.—THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE FESTIVAL.

"We have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him."—*Matt.*, ii, 2.

The light of divine truth, which was prefigured by the illustrious appearance of the star of Jacob, is alone worthy of the attention and solicitude of man. By its beams our souls are enlightened, the source of true pleasure is laid open to view, the solid basis on which alone we can found our hopes is disclosed, and the only lasting remedy for all our evils is revealed. This heavenly truth alone is the consolation of the innocent, and the reprover of the guilty. This alone immortalises those who love it, ennobles the chains of those who suffer for it, and gives respectability to the abjection and poverty of those who leave all to follow it. This alone gives birth to noble sentiments, inspires true heroism, and forms characters of which the world is not worthy.

With what solicitude, therefore, ought we to labour for the acquisition of such a treasure; with what resolution and zeal ought we to manifest it to others; and with what vigilance and circumspection ought we to guard it when possessed.

It is astonishing, however, to observe the different impressions which are caused by the manifestation of this heavenly light on the minds of men. To some it is a light which enlightens, and makes the duties which it manifests agreeable and easy. To others it is an unwelcome light, and by its appearance creates uneasiness and sorrow. To others it is like a thick cloud, which only excites their indignation and completes their blindness.

These various effects are exemplified in the gospel of this festival. In the three kings we behold men who open their hearts to receive the light of truth with sincerity and readiness; in the priests, men who either shut their eyes, or pretend that they do not see it; and in Herod, a dreadful example of obduracy and wickedness.

The same effects are daily witnessed among Christians at the present time. Some few receive it with joy, like the wise men; others conceal it through worldly motives; and

others persecute it by their scandalous lives and irregular discourses.

I will call your attention to these three descriptions of people in this discourse; and from their conduct I will draw a faithful sketch of the duties and obligations which the manifestation of the truth evidently points out to all Christians as essentially connected with their future happiness.

1. The light of truth is manifested to all, even to the most profligate livers; and points out in the clearest manner the way in which we should walk in order to fulfil the will of God. However deeply some men may be engulphed in the abyss of sensuality and vice, their eyes are sometimes opened to the vanity of their pursuits, to the splendid hopes which they renounce, and to the dreadful state which awaits them in the world to come. But the only effect which these rays of light produce in men of this description, is an increase of guilt; for, instead of availing themselves of the proffered blessing, they shut their eyes again, and basely continue on in the career of vice.

In the wise men, we behold examples of a ready correspondence with the calls and inspirations of heaven; illustrious examples indeed, and worthy to be proposed to the imitation of all Christians. Living, as they did, at an immense distance from the chosen people of God, they probably had no other knowledge of a Redeemer to come than what was derived from the prophecy of Balaam, or from the communications which their forefathers received from the Israelites during their captivity in the east. These traditions, however, may be supposed to have made little impression on the minds of men who, by their public profession of wisdom, were habituated to despise popular and vague opinions, and to attribute them to the credulity of the ignorant. But, no sooner did the star of Jacob appear—no sooner did the secret inspirations of the Holy Ghost inform them that it denoted the birth of the Great Leader, than they believed, and prepared to set out without delay to pay their homage to him. They examine not whether the apparition could be accounted for in a natural way. No time was lost in solving difficulties; none in defence of so extraordinary a project; they listened not to the scoffs and derisions which a measure so unprecedented may reasonably be supposed to have drawn upon them: what might be said or thought of them by others, was not an object for them to look at; they loved the truth; they saw the light that would conduct them to it; and heedless of every difficulty that attended them at the outset, and regardless of the perils that might await them in the many unknown

regions through which they might have to pass, like men whose wisdom and fortitude were superior to every encounter, they rejoiced at the sight of the happy omen, and immediately followed it.

Were mankind as ready in these times to open their eyes to the light of the Heavenly star which now shines with meridian splendour over the whole universe, how different would be the state of Christianity! But, alas! there are multitudes of Christians—I say it to our shame—there are multitudes of Christians who live in a state of uncertainty, or rather are addicted to passions which impel them to call in question the truths which condemn their disorders; and this for no other purpose than to silence the voice of conscience, which incessantly reproves them for their folly and inconsistency. Sometimes they assume an air of candour, and with a seeming eagerness submit their doubts to the examination of the learned. But their candour is counterfeit: they converse on the subject, not with the desire of being convinced of the truth, for of that they are already convinced, but in the hopes of destroying that conviction by their sophistry. I acknowledge, indeed, that real doubt on points both of morality and faith may sometimes exist in the understanding; for illusion will frequently put on so plausible an appearance, that no little strength of discernment is required to discover the deception. Upon those occasions, it is the duty of every one to seek advice from those who are established to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. But then, we must make our inquiries like the wise men: we must be simple and undisguised: we must desire to be enlightened, and not flattered; we must seek the truth sincerely, before we shall find it.

But, unhappily, this method of inquiry is very uncommon amongst Christians: and even amongst those who have renounced the dissipations of a worldly life, there are not a few to be found, who, I will say, are frequently strangers to it. There is generally some favourite attachment, some imperfection, which keeps possession of the heart, and which we refuse to relinquish. This we describe to our director in such plausible terms, that it is manifest we seek not the truth sincerely, and that we should be sorry to find it. Hence originate those habitual imperfections in virtuous men, which excite the derision of worldlings, and occasion reproaches and censures to be thrown on piety itself.

Ah! beloved Christians, if we loved the truth our first solicitude would be to discover every weakness and imperfection which are contradictory to its maxims: we should

love, we should reverence the man who pointed out our defects, and sought to heal the wounds which rankled in our hearts. David paid the highest honour to the prophet Nathan because he reproved him for his crimes, and treated him during the remainder of his life as his father and deliverer. The same should be our conduct. But, alas! the man of God who dares to reprove us immediately forfeits our esteem. As long as he was silent in our regard, he was treated as an enlightened, prudent, and charitable man—as a friend in every respect worthy of our confidence and esteem: like the precursor of our Lord in his remonstrances with the king of Galilee, he was listened to with pleasure as long as he did not interfere with our favourite passions; but no sooner does he say: "This is not lawful for you," than all his former perfections vanish instantly from our sight, and nothing is any longer what it was before: his zeal is now enthusiasm; his charity ostentation, or a vain complacency in censuring and opposing others; his piety imprudence, or a cloak with which he conceals his pride; his ideas of truth mere visionary forms, which he has mistaken for realities. Thus, it too frequently happens, that, although we are interiorly convinced of the imperfect state of souls, we cannot endure that others should reflect upon it. Like Saul, we require that Samuel should approve in public, what we ourselves condemn in private; and, by a corruption of heart which is perhaps more criminal than the weaknesses themselves, we extinguish in the minds of others that light of truth which we cannot extinguish in our own. How few are actuated by the same uprightness and sincerity as the wise men!

Again, the light of truth is oftentimes manifested to us without effect, because we are influenced by the impression which it makes on others. We see no reason why we should act differently from other men—why we should pursue the light of the divine star with more eager steps than those around us. Sometimes, indeed, the clear light which it throws over our past irregularities fills us with dismay; we condemn ourselves; we tremble at the idea of futurity; we propose a change of life. But, no sooner is our attention engaged by the general example before us, than we resist the heavenly monitor, and ask with some surprise, whether Heaven is to be purchased at a dearer rate by us than it is by other people. We will not believe that the Christian is bound to shut his eyes to the corrupted ways of the world, and open them only to the duties and obligations of his calling. We will not believe that we shall inevitably lose our souls, if we live like the generality of men; that is, if we are

conformed to the world, and are distinguished in nothing from the world: and the reason is, because we will not believe that the world is already judged, and that it is the great Antichrist which shall perish together with its head and members. Ah! how many timid Christians are there, who dare not declare for Heaven, because their change would be condemned by public example! How many, like Aaron in the desert, dance round the golden calf, and offer incense to an idol which they detest, merely because they have not courage to stand alone in the defence of truth! Senseless as we are, we look up to men, as if men were the truth, and as if we were to seek on earth, and not in Heaven like the wise men, the rule and light which ought to be our guide.

Small indeed is the number of those who, having discovered the truth, keep their attention permanently fixed upon it, and are dead to the world, to its empty pleasures, and to its vain pomps. Small, indeed, is the number of those who find no delight but in truth, and who make their consolation in affliction the end and recompense of all their labours, and their principal and only solid enjoyment in this place of exile. How truly vain, puerile, and disgusting is the world, with all its momentary pleasures, to the man who is enamoured of the truth of the eternal promises; who is convinced that all that is not God is not worthy of him; and that the earth is the land of consolation to those only who will perish everlastingly. Nothing can delight such a man, but the prospect of immortal good: nothing can fix his attention, but what will last for ever: nothing can engage his affections, but what we can enjoy eternally.

2. It is the duty, therefore, of every Christian to open his eyes to the light of truth with sincerity, submission, and joy. But this is not all: after we are enlightened, we are bound to diffuse the light abroad for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. And so obligatory is this duty, that if our neighbour be confirmed in his bad habits either by our silence or by our mean adulations, we become partakers of his sins, and shall be responsible for them before the tribunal of the Great Judge. An instance of such criminal behaviour is recorded for our instruction in this day's gospel. The priests and doctors were fully acquainted with the circumstances foretold by the prophets concerning the Messiah: and therefore when consulted by Herod, they were bound to return an answer expressive of the whole truth. But what was their reply? They simply point out the place assigned for his birth, and conceal every other circumstance. They neither proclaim the happy tidings to the people, nor invite them by

their own example to pay their homage to the new-born King. Restrained by their criminal timidity, they detain the truth of God in injustice, to their own condemnation.

The obligation of publishing the truth is imposed on all Christians. But, alas! by whom is it fulfilled? We imagine that no defence is required from us, when the children of error espouse the cause of the world in our presence; when they justify its maxims and abuses; when they arraign the severity of the Gospel precepts, blaspheme what they do not understand and assume the office of judges over that law, by which they themselves will hereafter be judged. But I here solemnly declare, that to be silent on those occasions, is to take part with the enemies of truth. For, to what purpose has God enlightened us? Was it exclusively for our own individual salvation? Far from it: his views were of much wider extent. He enlightens us in order that our words and example should correct, or at least reprove the irregularities of our relations, friends, masters, servants, and neighbours. The blessings which he has bestowed on us were intended to redound to the benefit of the country to which we belong, and to the age in which we live. He never raises up a vessel of election, without having in view the salvation or condemnation of many. He made us lights, for the express purpose that we should shine in the midst of the surrounding darkness; that we should perpetuate the knowledge of his truths among mankind, and give testimony to the wisdom and justice of his law, in opposition to the prejudices and vain thoughts of a profane world.

I acknowledge, indeed, that there is a time for silence, as well as a time for speaking, and that there are limits, beyond which the efforts of zeal would be imprudence. But I am shocked at the idea, that men who know and serve God should be afraid of espousing the cause of truth, when they hear the maxims of religion vilified, the good name of their neighbours injured, and the most criminal abuses of the world maintained and justified. I am shocked at the idea, that the world should have its declared partisans, and that no one should dare to proclaim himself the partisan of Jesus.

Ah! the truly just man is far exalted above every worldly consideration: his eye is fixed on heaven alone: the approbation of God is his only ambition: he fears nothing but the remorse of conscience: he has respect for nothing but justice and truth: he was placed on earth in order to give testimony to the truth, and to that he will give testimony in the face of the whole world. The presence alone of the truly just man is capable of imposing silence on the most embittered enemies

of piety: his venerable appearance compels them to respect the broad seal of truth which is stamped on his forehead, to stand in awe of his dignified intrepidity, and to pay homage, at least by their silence and confusion, to that virtue which they refuse to follow. The Israelites, awed and confounded in this manner in the midst of their profane dances and rejoicings round the golden calf, instantly ceased at the appearance of Moses descending from the mountain, armed only with the terrors of the law of the Lord and his eternal truths. Take courage, then, my beloved; espouse boldly the cause of God, and suffer no species of irreligion to reign triumphant in your presence.

3. It was my design to call your attention to the conduct of the impious Herod after the departure of the wise men, and to prove to you at large that the same spirit of persecution, with which he was actuated on that occasion, is entertained by an infinite number of Christians at the present time; but on this head I shall make only one reflection.

The spirit of persecution, to which I allude, is not of persecution by the sword, for that spirit is unknown amongst Christian brethren, but of persecutions by scandal; and of this kind the persecutions are widely extended and destructive indeed. It is not improbable but that you yourselves may come under this class of persecutors, although you have not thrown off the reins of morality, nor given yourselves up to a reprobate sense. The scandal which is given by the declared advocate of vice, is undoubtedly great; but the scandal which is given by the imperfect follower of the gospel, is frequently more pernicious in its effects. If, therefore, you fulfil your duties with exterior marks of tepidity—if you attempt to associate the world with Jesus Christ—if you pretend to a life of piety, and at the same time follow the maxims of worldlings, you are persecutors of the truth, because, by your example you confirm the calumnies which are invented against the truly virtuous, and cause piety itself to be blasphemed by sinners; you throw a shade over the beauties of truth; you make it appear disgusting to those who are disposed to embrace it; and you encourage the impenitence of those who are ready to seize the first pretext for deferring their conversion. In this nation particularly, surrounded as you are by men who are separated from the church and temple of the Lord, you cause the words of the prophet Jeremy to be again accomplished: "The unfaithful Israel hath justified her soul in comparison of the treacherous Juda."—*Jer.*, iii, 11. The unfaithful Israel, that is, your unbelieving neighbours, beholding in you, the inheritors of his promises, the same thirst

after gold, the same love of the world, the same vanities and follies as in themselves, turn away from your religion, and conclude that it signifies not which or what mode of faith they outwardly profess, since the moral conduct of all is the same.

Let me, therefore, my dearly beloved brethren, exhort you, with the apostle, so to regulate your deportment in the eyes of men, that, instead of ranking you among the workers of evil, they may be edified by the display of your good works, and open their hearts to the inspirations of God, when in his mercy he shall visit them with his graces. Impose silence on the enemies of your religion by the innocence of your lives: convince the world that your piety is useful for all things; that it not only holds out the prospect of future happiness, but that it imparts peace and tranquility of mind, the only pleasures worthy of enjoyment in this life.

Let us, therefore, give glory to the truth; and for this purpose, let us receive it with joy, like the wise men, the instant it is manifested to us: let us not detain it in injustice, like the priests, when it is our duty to discover it to others; and let us not persecute it, like Herod, by the imperfections and irregularities of our lives. Then, after having walked in its light during the time of our mortal pilgrimage, we shall be all hereafter sanctified together in truth, and consummated in charity.

X.—FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

HOMAGE WHICH IS PAID TO VIRTUE BY THE WORLD.

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world."—*Rom.*, xii, 1, 2.

Happy should I be, beloved Christians, could I convince you that the service which God requires of you is reasonable; and that not to be conformed to this world is the only means of attaining true honour and glory in the estimation both of God and man. But by what arguments can this be effected? The greater number of Christians are deterred from the public profession of piety by the fear of what the world will say. The greater number of Christians are conformed to this world in order to avoid its censures and ridicule. How then shall I work an entire change in your sentiments, and convince you that virtue is applauded by the world, and that the just man has more to fear from its adulatory homage and veneration

than from its derision and contempt? Oh! had I the abilities of St. Paul, in what glowing colours would I exhibit before your eyes the reasonableness of the service; in what words would I describe the happy liberty and peace of mind which attend the practice of virtue; how clearly would I expose the futility of those pretexts which you allege in justification of your conformity with the world; and how satisfactorily would I prove, that every species of true honour, esteem, admiration, and applause among men, would attend your resolution, and exalt you far above the level which you at present occupy among the followers of the world!

It is a fact, my beloved, that the world, averse as it is to the practice of virtue itself, has a respect for virtue in others; it envies the happiness of the just: it pays even public homage to their piety: and although its censures are sometimes loud and contemptuous, they are never aimed at virtue itself, but at the weaknesses and failings of its imperfect followers.

I readily allow that the scriptures declare that persecutions shall be the portion of all who live piously in Jesus Christ (2 *Tim.*, ii, 12); and therefore, God forbid that, by describing the honours which attend the virtuous on earth, I should pretend to call in question the words of truth; or by denying that virtue is characterized by sufferings, deprive the just man of one of the most persuasive motives to patient endurance under the many trials to which his piety is exposed. But the persecutions which he experiences from the world, are not necessarily confined, says St. Augustin, to contempt and derision. They more frequently consist in the display of false charms, which endanger his innocence: they more frequently consist in flattering inducements and solicitations to vice: they more frequently consist in scandals authorized by custom, which are calculated either to weaken his piety, or at least to embitter his days with sorrow. Various, therefore, are the species of persecutions: reproaches and contempt are neither the most dangerous nor the most common.

Although the world is the declared enemy of Jesus Christ; although in practice it knows not God; although it calls good evil, and evil good; nevertheless, worldly as it is, it entertains a respect for virtue, it forms the highest opinion of the happiness of the just man, flies to his society for refuge and consolation in its distress, and frequently pays public homage to him.

1. It must not be supposed that error and corruption have so far prevailed over the earth as to have effaced from the minds of men the vestiges of moral rectitude, and extinguished the spark of virtue. The most abandoned sinner is

sometimes obliged to listen to the voice of reason and religion, which, in the interior of his soul, espouses the cause of truth, and forces him to respect what he has not the resolution to embrace. The countenance of the just man appears decked with heavenly charms, and extorts secret homage from the most flagitious; he resembles the ark of the Lord, the abode of his glory, which even among the Philistines retains its terrors and its majesty.

The more the worldling is enslaved to his passions, the more does he interiorly esteem the man who has fought and conquered them. The more rapidly he is borne down the impetuous torrent of pleasure, the more does he admire the magnanimity and courage of the soul which is capable of resisting its incessant and, in his opinion, irresistible violence. From every shameful fall he collects an honourable testimony in favour of virtue; because, from experience of his own weakness, he is more sensibly convinced of the strength of mind which it inspires. Hence the just man appears in his eyes infinitely more worthy of admiration, than all the great personages whom the world extols. He forms a comparison between the respective merits of both, and invariably gives the palm to the virtuous. He remarks that good fortune, or even bold temerity, may form conquerors; that birth or chance may bestow crowns and sceptres; that men who are called great, may be indebted for that proud appellation, either to the peculiar circumstances of the age in which they lived, or the caprice and adulations of the people; that honours and dignities are not always the fruit of real merit: in a word, that, genius, cultivated with labour and perseverance, may attain every degree of glory which the world can bestow: and moreover he remarks, that in all these various acquirements, the soul inherited from nature the first dispositions, and as it were, the outlines of that glory which was the object of her ambition, and which she attained. On the other hand, he reflects that piety is a merit to which the just man is entitled independently of every living creature; a merit pure and unadulterated; a merit which is acquired by opposing the dispositions of nature, and in the pursuit of which he must necessarily encounter continual obstacles and repugnance in his own breast. In this manner, even vice contributes to honour virtue, and darkness gives testimony to the light.

The esteem of the world, moreover, is not confined to silent admiration: it raises its voice: it publicly proclaims that the just man is happy: it envies his lot, and declares that he has chosen the better part. Ah! my friends, you perhaps

have imagined that sinners, the slaves of their debauched inclinations, were incessantly inebriated with the fumes of sensuality and worldly enjoyments; you perhaps have thought that the illusion continued without interruption, and that their whole life was a pleasant dream. But the case is far otherwise. For, even in the midst of their false pleasures, they secretly acknowledge that the happiness of the just man is far superior to their own; they compare the peaceful serenity of his conscience with the ceaseless remorse to which they are the devoted prey; the sweet consolations which he enjoys in the paths of virtue, with the bitter ingredients which the world mixes in their cups of pleasure; the silent and undisturbed tranquillity of his retirement, with the continual hurry and anxiety of their hopes and fears: his days full of good works, and devoted to the great business of salvation, with their days spent in the pursuit of pleasure, in doing nothing to the purpose, and in which few moments can be said to be devoted either to the glory of God or the good of their fellow creatures. They make this comparison even in the midst of their debaucheries, and the effect it produces on their minds is painful indeed: it forces repeated sighs from their bosom; it displays before their eyes the melancholy state of their own soul, and exposes in the most engaging charms the happy lot of the just. Why, then, do yot hesitate to declare yourselves the servants of Jesus Christ in the presence of sinners? Be not afraid: they will wish to resemble you the instant you have ceased to resemble them.

Perhaps you have frequently sought after the applause of men, and with that view have exhibited before them the full display of your talents. But have you ever succeeded in the attempt? No: the world looks down, I will not say, with indifference, but with contempt and scorn, on the person who avowedly courts its approbation and smiles. One beautiful woman will not flatter another; one vain man will not extol another. The world is not fond of bestowing praise on its own: it points out the weaknesses and defects, and not the good qualities of its adorers; it seeks to depress, and not to exalt its votaries. But, if you embrace a life of virtue, the world no longer considers you as its own, and therefore it will not seek to lessen your reputation; or rather, it will not only allow you the highest degree of merit to which your piety is entitled, but will likewise extol and magnify every other good quality which it had unjustly called in question. Depend upon it, therefore, that the world will not esteem the qualities on which you now pride yourselves, until you yourselves despise them for the love of Jesus.

Do this, and the world will soon exclaim: "How admirable it is to see a person of his age, or in his circumstances, renounce with a resolute mind the vanities and follies of a sinful life." The minister of God indeed will not flatter you so far as to say that your merits will be equal to the applause which you will receive. For, were kings to throw their crowns and sceptres at thy feet, O God! what would they renounce? Agreeable dream and real anxieties. What would they sacrifice? Nothing, when compared with the treasures with which thou enrichest the faithful soul, and the glory which he will acquire in serving thee. The world, however, incompetent as it is to judge of spiritual things, will admire and extol the merit of this your sacrifice: and so far from having reason to dread its censures, you will be confused by its unmerited applause; you will exclaim against their adulations: you will treat them as injurious to the honour of God; and humbled into the dust at the sight of your own nothingness, of which you will then be more sensibly convinced, you will say: "What have I renounced, my God, for which thou hast not repaid me a hundred fold?"

Great and glorious indeed is this homage which the world pays to piety. But this is not all; it not only applauds and envies the choice of the just man, but in his fidelity and rectitude alone does it seek and find consolation. For the truth of this assertion I will appeal to your own experience. By whom were you comforted and supported in your afflictions and distress, on those trying occasions when you were either deserted by your former companions, or when their society was insupportable? Was it not by the faithful and pious friend? Was it not he, says St. Augustin, who poured oil on your wounds, who instilled into your troubled minds the soothing balm of resignation to the decrees of Heaven, who alleviated your sorrows, and, by being admitted into the secret recesses of your heart, removed the heavy load by which it was oppressed? Have you not experienced that the man of virtue alone can share in the disgraces of a friend without coolness, and rejoice in his prosperity without envy?

Yes, my beloved, the afflicted worldling seeks consolation in the society of the just. There he breathes that air of candour, sincerity, and truth which he enjoys not in the world. Into their bosom he pours forth the secret emotions of his heart, and to them lays open the inmost recesses of his soul. In their presence he beholds the folly of indulging melancholy and uneasiness on account of the vicissitudes of life, and candidly acknowledges that there is nothing in the world but vanity and affliction of spirit. With them he is

not restrained by the thought that perhaps he is confiding his secrets to a false friend. With them his heart dilates, he enjoys peace, he is free from suspicion and mistrust, and he tastes the ineffable pleasure of displaying his whole soul without fear.

In this source the public honours which the world pays to virtue may be said peculiarly to originate. Frequently have we seen men of obscure extraction, but ennobled by the gifts of grace, acquire greater esteem and more honourable distinctions than birth and dignity ever obtained. Servants of God, of the meanest origin, according to the world, have been the arbiters of princes and their people, and have, by the mere reputation of their sanctity, been received with greater homage and veneration than the most haughty vanity ever dared to aspire to. Anthony the hermit, a man who enjoyed no worldly distinction amongst his countrymen, was renowned through the whole universe; and emperors themselves rejoiced more at receiving a letter from the man of God, than in wearing the diadem. Jehu, king of Israel, seated the holy man, Jonadab, in his own chariot at a pompous solemnity, and royal majesty did not blush to behold on his right hand the simplicity of a prophet. Daniel, one of the children of captivity, received in the palace, even of an infidel king, and in a nation where he was a slave, the honours of the purple robe and golden collar, which were the highest honours in the state. The most licentious court of Palestine publicly venerated the austerity of John the Baptist; and Herod endured with respect the bold reproofs of the Precursor, until his weakness abandoned him to the lascivious cruelty of his adulterous consort.

O man! why are you ashamed of piety? Piety alone, says the Spirit of God, will make you illustrious among the people, cause you to be honoured by the wise and the ancients, give you respectability even in the presence of kings, and, what is more, will be the means of your attaining to life eternal, and of leaving behind you a renown that will last for ages to come (*Wisd.*, viii, 10, 11, 13).

Be careful only that your piety be not stained with any weakness of human nature, and that the remnants of your former bad dispositions, passions, and defects, be entirely subdued; for these in general are the causes of the derisions and censures of the world. Do this, and then you will have nothing more to fear, than lest your first step towards a reformation of life should receive the applause which is due only to perfect repentance, lest the world should attempt to crown you before you have fought and conquered, lest the misguided

judgment of the public should throw a veil over the remnants of your former defects, and lest, by the repeated approbations bestowed on your feeble commencement in piety, you should be lulled into a false security, and should forget your past crimes—crimes which perhaps a whole life spent in weeping and penance would be inadequate to atone for.

Here is your danger. Tremble, then, I say, for perhaps this undeserved esteem of men may be a judgment of God upon you, awarding this empty recompense in consideration of some natural virtues that you possess, and reserving for hereafter the punishment which your concealed pride has deserved. The number of false penitents who thus receive their reward in this life, is probably very great, and therefore the greatest danger which threatens a Christian on his first entrance on a life of piety, is the too hasty applause of the world, for we are naturally inclined to overrate our own exertions, and if the public should overrate them likewise, we should be too ready to conclude that we had finished our career before we had completed the first step, and thus the world, which first seduced us by diminishing, in our eyes, the enormity of sin, would seduce us again by exaggerating our virtues.

Be, therefore, on your guard; pay no attention to man, or to the opinion of man, but perform all your actions as if God was your only witness; submit your cause to his decision, for he alone is just and true, and be resigned to the consequences which may result from the impression which your change may make on the world. If it be his will that your conduct should meet with the approbation and praise of men, he will, in the midst of these vain acclamations, infuse into your souls a more perfect knowledge of your weakness and dependence. Paul, at the time that a whole city, captivated with the lustre of his piety, proclaimed him a god, and were preparing their sacrifices—Paul, at the time that he was received by the faithful as an angel of the Most High—Paul, I say, in the midst of these accumulated honours, was humbled by the shameful sting of Satan; God, who alone was the author of his exaltation, stamped upon his heart the humiliating evidence of his own weakness, lest he should attempt to exalt himself.

But if, on the contrary, it be his will that derision and censure be the portion of your virtue, he will amply compensate for these exterior trials by secret consolations, and he will oppose an insurmountable barrier to the combinations and efforts of a profane world. We are despised, said the Apostle, we are trodden under foot like dirt, but we are not dejected; we are treated as the outcast of the world, the offscouring of

all even until now; but we rejoice in these tribulations, because we enjoy the ineffable consolations of Jesus, who never fails to administer the sweet balm of heavenly delights to his servants when they are suffering for his name.

Throw yourselves, therefore, into the arms of his love, and be not solicitous for the consequences. Begin at least to serve him. Break asunder the chains, shake off the yoke, which have so long held you in bondage. Dare to despise the judgment of a world, the fallacy of whose pleasure you have experienced, and no longer insult the majesty of God, by fearing him less than man. Listen to the dictates of reason, and attribute not too great importance to the opinion of creatures; or rather, be not led away by the supposition that piety is always ridiculed and despised.

Do thou, O God, complete the work thou hast begun. Enlighten and support the steps, give strength to the timid and wavering resolutions of these thy servants on their first entrance through the narrow gate. Convince them that thy judgments alone are to be feared, that the derision and scoffs of the world add a new lustre and increased merit to the actions which are agreeable to thy divine majesty, and that the works of piety which thy grace has enabled them to perform can receive no competent reward unless thou bestowest thyself.

XI.—SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

WORKS OF CHARITY TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

"Loving one another with brotherly love....communicating to the necessities of the saints; pursuing hospitality."—*Rom.*, xii, 10, 13.

Although the obligation of communicating to the necessities of our neighbours is so frequently inculcated in holy writ, and so universally known and acknowledged by Christians of every denomination, nevertheless, its extent is so little understood, and the means of making our charities subservient to salvation are so little attended to, that it is the duty of the pastor to expose, from time to time, before the eyes of the faithful, the precise maxims of the Gospel on that subject. Many there are with revenues more than ample to supply the utmost wants of nature, whose unfeeling or covetous dispositions induce them to believe that the precept is fulfilled to the extent required by bestowing a few superfluities and a casual trifle on the poor. To these it is necessary to repeat the dreadful anathemas pronounced by the Spirit of God against

those who refuse to administer assistance and relief to their distressed fellow-members in proportion to their means. Others, because their worldly substance is small and barely sufficient for the supply of their own necessities, imagine that they are totally exempted from the obligation of charity. To these it is necessary to state, that charity has many branches, and that as much, in proportion to their means, is required from the poor as from the rich.

It is, moreover, incumbent on the pastor, not only to enlarge from time to time on the above subjects, but to display the motives on which charity ought to be founded. The merit of charity consists not in the gift alone, but in the intention and disposition of the giver. The man who is charitable through pride, vain-glory, or through the mere natural sentiments of compassion, will be rejected by the Judge at the last day with these words: *Amen, thou hast received thy reward.* The man who loves his neighbour and relieves his distresses, and at the same time continues obstinate in his wicked ways, will acquire no title to an eternal recompense. Be attentive, whilst I enlarge on these manifold parts of charity.

1. It is an established maxim of religion, that every Christian is charged with the care of his brother in affliction, and that the law, by commanding us to love him, imposes the obligation of succouring and relieving him in distress. This is a necessary deduction: for love cannot exist without a feeling and sympathy for the object beloved, nor consequently without endeavouring to remove the cause of his sufferings. The precept, therefore, of loving our neighbour, is something more than a command to refrain from injuring him either in his property, reputation, or person; it enforces the duty of protecting him against the malevolence of others, and of parting even with what is our own when his necessities require it: it is something more than an interdiction of hatred, animosity, and revenge; it exacts from us the same sincerity of love towards him as we feel for ourselves.

Works of charity, therefore, are not merely recommended as tending to greater perfection, but they are imposed as an indispensable law on every Christian.

By the grace which united us in baptism to the assembly of the saints, we were all made members of the same body, and children of the same Father. We then contracted an intimate and sacred connection with every individual of the faithful. All distinctions between noble and peasant, rich and poor, were then done away. From that time the distresses and wants of others are become our own: when a

fellow-member suffers, we are bound to suffer with him; nor can we refuse him our attention, our solicitude, and our services, without renouncing the sacred bond by which we are all united together under Jesus Christ, and which is the only foundation of our hopes, and our only pledge of eternal glory. The first Christians possessed everything in common; because, from the time of their conversion, they formed but one heart and one soul. They sold all they had, and deposited the amount in the hands of the apostles, because they deemed it useless to be the legal owners of a property which was become the property of their brethren, and of which necessity alone could regulate the expenditure for their own use.

This duty of charity increases in proportion to the wealth of the possessor. The truth of this position I will demonstrate in a few words. Prosperity, and abundance of earthly possessions, cannot make void the obligation of practising the frugality, the simplicity, and the self-denial enjoined by the gospel. In vain have we amassed, like the Israelites, more manna than our brethren; we can apply no more to our own use than what is prescribed by the law—"he that had much had nothing over."—2 *Cor.*, viii, 15. This will not admit of doubt; unless it can be proved that Jesus forbade luxury, dissipation, and pleasure, to the poor and wretched only, the poverty of whose state would have rendered such a prohibition nugatory.

If, therefore, it be contrary to the rules of the gospel to devote wealth to the gratifying of the sensual appetite: if the rich man be obliged to carry his cross, to seek not his consolation in this world, and to deny himself continually, in the same manner as the poor man, to what purpose, I ask, has Providence heaped so large a portion of the goods of the earth on a few individuals? Was it that they might cherish their disorderly passions? But the scriptures declare, that we are no longer indebted to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. Was it that they might support the pride of rank and birth? By no means: for our lives ought to be hidden with Christ in God. Was it that their days might flow on in tranquillity and indolence? Certainly not: for if we do not mourn, if we do not suffer and fight, we shall perish. Was it in order to attach them more to the world? Far from it: for the Christian is not a citizen of this world, but of the world to come. Was it that they might feast sumptuously every day? No: for the rich man in the gospel was condemned on that very account: and who shall walk in his footsteps and be favoured with a milder sentence? Flesh

and blood shall not possess the kingdom of Heaven: if you do not penance, you shall perish. Was it that they might amass riches, and extend their possessions? Ah! what will it profit them, if they gain the whole world, and lose their own souls? Enumerate all the advantages, according to the world, which prosperity affords, and you will find that almost all are in opposition to the law of God.

What, therefore, were the designs of God in heaping riches on individuals? It was, that they might be the ministers of his Providence to those who suffer: it was that certain depositories, secure alike from violence and fraud, might be provided for the widow and orphan, in order that strength life might be imparted to every member of the body, and that none might be in danger of perishing through want. These were the designs of Providence; and these designs must be fulfilled: "For to him who knoweth to do good," says St. James, "and doth it not, it is sin. Wo to you rich . . . your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath."—*James*, v.

The precept of charity, therefore, is obligatory, in the first place, on the more wealthy members of the community, and this in proportion to their means. The obligation, however, is not confined solely to them: the precept is general, and extends to all: every member is required to succour his fellow-member in distress. I will elucidate this point by observing, that charity does not exclusively consist in distributing alms, as the scriptures abundantly testify: but is divided into several branches, many of which may be performed as well by the lower as by the higher classes of society. To visit the sick, to comfort the afflicted, to pray for all, are acts of charity, from the performance of which no one is debarred, and from the obligation of which no one can be exempted.

You, therefore, amongst my present auditory, whose poverty will allow you only to bestow a little, let me exhort you to bestow that little willingly, like the poor widow in the gospel. (*Luke* xxi, 2). The Lord will repay you. In addition to this, apply sedulously to the other branches of charity which are within your power; visit the sick, comfort the afflicted, fly to the bedside of your suffering fellow-member, cheer his desponding spirits, and reconcile him to chastisements which are inflicted by a merciful God.

In order to form a just estimate of these works of charity, suppose for a moment that you yourselves are laid on the

bed of sickness, languishing under the pains of a mortal disease, and that the Christian friend enters your apartment of sorrow, pours oil on your wounds, respects your loathsome flesh as the temple of the Holy Ghost, venerates you as the image of God, loves you as a brother—as a fellow-member—as a coheir of eternal bliss, calms your impatience by the maxims of faith, and submits to every inconvenience, in order either to mitigate your sufferings, or promote your salvation. Would he not impart the most soothing consolation to your mind? Ah! you would call this charity indeed. You would lift up your hands to Heaven, and exclaim: "Lord, thou art rich in mercy: thou wilt never abandon them that put their trust in thee: thy eye is ever attentive to the necessities of thy creatures, and thou wilt not suffer them to be afflicted without consolation, or above their strength." This, perhaps, is the most eminent branch of charity, and is in the power of every one to perform. Let me exhort you, therefore, to be attentive to it, and consider it as a duty which you owe to your fellow-members.

I will now proceed to the motives by which you ought to be actuated, in order to be entitled to the reward which is prepared for the charitable Christian.

2. Exterior works of piety have no merit in the sight of God, except they tend to the sanctification of the inward man; for the kingdom of God is within us, and the establishment of that kingdom is promoted only by works which contribute to the extinction of vice, and to the complete subjugation of the passions. According to this maxim of religion, the works of charity, namely, the relieving our brethren by almsdeeds, the consoling, visiting, or attending them in their afflictions, are the promoters of piety, but they are not piety itself: they are the duties of a Christian, but they form not the whole of his character. Charity, in order to be entitled to an eternal reward, must contribute to the increase and purification of our virtue; it must be the daily remedy for our imperfections, and every individual act must tend to the right ordering of some one or other of our passions. For this purpose we must look into the state of our souls, and examine by the light of grace the nature and the extent of our depraved inclinations. This done, we must select those works of mercy which, by their opposite tendency, are calculated to effect our deliverance from their odious tyranny. For instance, if our affections are centred in the world and its vanities, we must give the preference to those works which more frequently call us away from the noise and hurry of the world, and engage us in prayer, silence, and retirement.

If our disposition is passive and indolent, if we have not sufficient courage to stimulate ourselves to works of self denial, and we lead a more sensual and effeminate life than what is usually led in the world, although perhaps disgust or other motives have induced us to live in retirement: ah! then the more laborious, the more painful works of mercy, attendance on the more disgusting, the more wretched objects of misery, ought to be our choice. If in the duties of religion we seek to distinguish ourselves from others, and court the applause of the world, we must then prefer the more obscure works of mercy, and those in particular which are likely to expose us to the derisions of the unwise. If our temper is hasty and vehement, and we are irritated and ruffled by every trifling contradiction or untoward event, then we must choose the works which require mildness and patience in the performance, and be ready to endure with calmness the complaints, the discontents, the ingratitude, and even the abuses of those whom we relieve. In a word, it must be our object to select the works of mercy which will the most effectually habituate us to the practice of those virtues to which we are strangers.

This, my beloved friends, is an important subject for your consideration. Exterior works, as I said above, have no merit except they promote our sanctification: and our sanctification is not promoted but by the correction of our vices. The new man is formed in our souls in proportion only as the old man, the man of sin, is destroyed. Those works only augment the life of the spirit which mortify the inclinations of the flesh: those works only give additional strength to the inspirations of grace which weaken our unlawful propensities. In the life of a Christian, almost every action ought to be a sacrifice; for the Christian lives by faith, and every action that is performed through motives of faith, must of its own nature be painful to flesh and blood, because it is necessarily in opposition to the dictates of the sensual man.

In this manner works of mercy ought to be made the daily sacrifice of the faithful Christian: the apostle distinguishes them by that name; "for by such sacrifices," says he, exhorting the faithful to the pious offices of charity, "by such sacrifices God's favour is obtained."—*Heb.*, xiii, 16.

We violate this maxim of religion two different ways. In the first place, having received from nature a tender and feeling heart, which is easily affected at the sight of others' woes, we are charitable merely through the sentiments of human compassion; on some occasions we are charitable through gratitude; on others, through friendship; and on all,

through motives which are agreeable to our taste and inclination.

I readily allow, that the man who is charitable through these motives fulfils a moral and social duty, and therefore I pretend not to say, either that these happy dispositions ought to be resisted, or that no merit is acquired *merely* because they are in unison with our natural feelings. No, my beloved brethren, it is the duty of religion to make the gifts of nature subservient to grace. These natural dispositions to virtue are gifts of the Creator, which, according to the designs of his providence, ought to be made the first foundations of our spiritual edifice. But we must reflect that piety is not confined within the limits of nature: that it extends far beyond them; and that, if we stop at these boundaries, we have done nothing, we are only at the entrance of the narrow gate, where the path is rugged and strewed with thorns. Ah! however happy our dispositions may be, we shall never advance far, if we only comply with their dictates, without any reference to the conquering of our vices and passions. This, therefore, is the rule which we ought to bear in mind, namely, that the exterior works of piety, which leave us as sensual, as unmortified, as imperfect as we were before, have only the appearance, and not the substance, of the virtue of charity.

In the second place, this maxim is violated in a more culpable manner. There are many who lead a worldly, sensual, and profane life, and rely with unsuspecting security on their works of mercy, and on the abundance of their alms. Like the daughters of Tyre, they expect to appease the wrath of the great king by mingling charity with their worldly pleasures. They imagine that charity covers all; that prayer, retirement, self-denial, and the other most indispensable maxims of a Christian life may be neglected, and their sins atoned for by largesses to the poor. But, my God! how light would then be thy cross; how favourable to riches and sensuality would then be thy doctrine; and how very open and easy the path that leads to life! Ah! the Lord demands not our gold alone, but our hearts. Charity, it is true, contributes to the expiation of the sins of which we repent; but it does not justify the passions which we continue to indulge: it is the fruit of piety; but it is not the license for vice.

My God! give me a compassionate and tender heart, but suffer not my eyes to be shut to my multiplied transgressions. Infuse the holy spirit of charity into my breast, but suffer not the artful delusions of Satan to lead me into that fatal error, that alms exempt from penance, lest my good works

contribute more to my condemnation, than to the accumulation of a never-failing treasure in heaven.

Moreover, our title to a reward hereafter is forfeited as often as we are not actuated in the distribution of our charities by a proper intention. On this subject, however, I shall only say, that we must have no ostentatious views, but be more desirous that our charities should be concealed from the eyes of the public, than that they should be the subjects of admiration and applause: we must be willing that even our left hand be ignorant of what our right hand doeth. The love of God, and the desire of accomplishing his blessed will alone must be our motive: we must respect a brother in distress, as being a fellow-member of the same body; and we must relieve him with the same love and good will as if Jesus Christ in person pleaded his cause before us.

Good God! exclaims St. Augustin, how many good works, on which we confidently rely here below, will be rejected when the Lord Jesus shall come to judge justice! how many fruits of charity, with which we expect to be enriched for eternity, will be found corroded by the worm of pride and vain glory! how little will be left in our hands, after the Judge has separated the good from the bad, the works of nature from the works of grace! and how will our supposed treasures melt away, when he shall allot an eternal reward to those only which were performed through pure motives of love, and with the sole desire of pleasing Him!

Let us meditate on these truths, my beloved brethren, whilst we have time. This is our day: let us work before the night overtakes us. The conditions which I have described are numerous, I allow; but they are not calculated to deter you from exerting your whole strength in the cause of God and of your souls: on the contrary, they are consoling —they are encouraging—they are easy. I will enumerate them one by one, and appeal to your own decision for the truth of what I assert.

In the first place, I informed you that the exercise of charity is a duty; that it is imposed on you, not as a matter of counsel, but as an absolute and indispensable command. What more persuasive argument than this could I have employed, in order to make it appear amiable in your eyes? Will its charms be diminished, because it is imposed as a duty by Him who made you? Will it be less pleasing to the disciple, because it is more pleasing to the master?

Secondly, I declared that these works of mercy ought to be made the daily sacrifices for the faults which you daily commit. My friends, what could be more consoling than to be

informed of a new source of merit in these pious duties—to be directed to hidden treasures, which the greater number of Christians never expected to discover in them? What could be more desirable than to learn that you may acquire, by the means of charity, every virtue which you have not hitherto possessed; that you may apply it as a remedy to all your evils; that you may obtain by its means patience, purity, mildness, love of prayer, and, if you please, love even of retirement; and that in this single duty of religion, you may reap the fruits of all the rest?

Lastly, I declared that your acts of charity must be performed as if God alone were your witness; and that the applauses and censures of men must be totally disregarded. Is this declaration calculated to diminish the charitable dispositions of your breasts? What are all mankind, when compared with God, that the faithful soul should be influenced by them? Shall the esteem of a world which she despises, which she has renounced, appear in her eyes a sufficient reward for actions which will be crowned with eternal glory? Is there danger of weakening her charity, if I inform her that the whole world is not worthy of her, that God alone deserves to be the witness of actions which he alone can reward; and that, in order to secure their just recompense, it is necessary that she seek no other glory than that which will never end?

No, my dearly beloved, the spirit of the law does not operate against the fulfilling of the law. On the contrary, the more we advance in piety, the more will our charity increase: the more we are acquainted with the law of love, the more vehemently shall we aspire after its perfection in our souls. Error is unmasked in proportion as it is examined; but truth appears in greater splendour, the clearer it is seen. Thus, when we behold it in its true colours hereafter, we shall love it with fervour, with sincerity, and with constancy.

XII.—THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

ON A FUTURE STATE.

"The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth."—*Matt.*, viii, 12.

This, dear Christians, is the term of all the desires, hopes, counsels, and enterprises of the wicked. Here shall end the vain reflections of the wise, the doubt and incertitude of unbelievers, the mighty projects of conquerors, the monuments of

human glory, the solicitudes of ambition, the distinctions of talents, and the pride of man. This life therefore, is a fleeting moment, the prelude only of an eternal futurity. Exterior darkness or inaccessible light will be the apportioned lot of all.

Unhappily, a spirit of irreligion and incredulity has in these times spread its baneful influence over the Christian world. The reality of a future state is called in question by many, and the evil continues to increase. It is not, indeed, surprising that dissolute men, in order to silence the voice of conscience in the midst of their unlawful pleasures, should endeavour to raise doubts on this subject. A miserable eternity is a dreadful thought: it throws a gloom over all the enjoyments of the world; for which reason the devil has at all times endeavoured to efface the idea from the minds of his followers. The belief of a future state of punishments and rewards is a galling check on the passions, and therefore he is sensible that he can never succeed in forming hardened sinners, till he has first made them unbelievers.

In this discourse I will prove the weakness of the arguments on which infidelity is founded. I will prove that the wicked will survive their abominations, and that death, which puts an end to their crimes, will not close their existence. I will in the first place prove the *certainty* of a future state from the pure light of reason: and secondly, the *necessity*, from the greatness and justice of God, and the universal consent of all ages and nations. Not that I suppose that any individual in this assembly is tainted with this fatal error: but my object is, to show you the strong foundations on which your faith is built, to excite you to raise your thoughts to Heaven, the happy mansion to which you are invited, and to supply you with proper arguments if chance should lead you into the company of unbelievers.

1. The pretended *uncertainty* of a world to come is the basis on which the security of unbelievers is founded. "We know not what or where this other world is," they observe; "perhaps there is nothing beyond the grave: let us therefore enjoy the present moment, and leave to chance a futurity which either does not exist, or which, at least, we are not permitted to explore."

If we examine the origin of this pernicious error, we shall immediately discover that interest and passion, and not the love of truth, was the source from which it sprung. The unbeliever inherited the same principle of natural religion as the rest of mankind: he found written in his heart a law which forbade violence, injustice, and perfidy; an interior monitor

whispered in his soul that he should not do to others what he would not that others should do to him. Education strengthened these principles of nature; he was taught to know, to love, and to serve the Author of his existence: instruction made him acquainted with the rules of virtue, and example excited him to follow them.

The unbeliever, therefore, at his entrance into life adored the Supreme Being like the rest of men: he respected his laws, he feared his judgments, he hoped for his promises. How comes it, then, that he now rejects God, that he considers hell only as a fable, futurity as a dream, the soul as a spark which is extinguished with the body? By what means has he made this wonderful discovery. Was it by deep and protracted meditation? Did he assist the efforts of his own weak reason by consulting the learned and unprejudiced? Did he purify his heart, in order to counteract the influence of his passions? In an affair of such consequence, the greatest circumspection, the most mature reflections were undoubtedly necessary.

No, he did nothing of all this. The pretended discovery owes its origin to far different causes. The truths of religion began to appear doubtful, in proportion as his morals were corrupted; then only he wished to be convinced that man was like the beasts of the field, when he had brutalized the faculties of his soul; impiety gained admittance by shutting every avenue to truth; and incredulity gained his affections, when he perceived that it alone could deaden the stings of conscience, and enable him to give loose to the most infamous passions without restraint. By these means he acquired the sublime knowledge of infidelity; by these great efforts he discovered a truth which had been concealed from, or more properly held in detestation by, the rest of men.

Yes, my beloved friends, corruption of the heart was the source from whence this fatal error took its rise. Show me, if you can, a prudent, chaste, disinterested, and temperate man, who disbelieves in God, who expects not a future state, and who considers impurities and abominations as the bias and sport of innocent nature. If such a man exists, he either indulges his passions in private, and is exteriorly virtuous, in order to give authority to his impious tenets; or he indulged them formerly, and now, satiated with their excesses, throws himself into the arms of temperance, as the only source of pure enjoyment. Debauchery was the first origin of infidelity: his heart was corrupted before his faith was lost: self-interest induced him to believe that his soul was mortal: and the cause of his present moral deportment arises solely from the disgust

occasioned by the reiterated gratification of the sensual appetite.

Let us, however, proceed to the reasons on which the basis of infidelity is founded. You will allow that no one should renounce a belief of such serious consequence as is that of eternity, on slight and trivial grounds; neither should any one abandon the universal opinion of mankind, the religion of all ages, unless urged to it by the evidence of truth. Now what are his reasons? "We know not," he says, "what or where this other world is: perhaps there is nothing beyond the grave." These are the insurmountable reasons which the Deist opposes to the faith of the whole universe. O man! reflect for a moment. A single doubt is sufficient to make you an infidel, and all the well supported proofs of religion are insufficient to make you a believer. The only foundation of your opinion is incertitude; and you call religion, although standing on the firmest basis, an imposition on the credulity of the multitude.

But let us examine which of the two, the infidel or the Christian, is more open to this reproach of credulity. The Christian's belief of a future state is founded on the authority of the scriptures, a book beyond contradiction the most deserving of credit; on the deposition of apostolic men, who have shed their blood in defence of the truth, and to whose doctrine the conversion of the most enlightened part of the world has given testimony; on the accomplishment of prophecies, a character of truth which impiety cannot counterfeit; on the tradition of all ages, of all nations, of all people. The infidel, on the other hand, gives credit to a doctrine which is supported by nothing more than a simple doubt, a mere suspicion. "Who has seen it?" he says. "We know not where it is." Credulity, therefore, is a reproach which attaches to the infidel alone.

But supposing that the reasons for and against the belief of a futurity were equal, nevertheless, even in this case, I say, the infidel ought to admire, and wish that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul were true; a doctrine which confers such honour on man: a doctrine which teaches him that his origin is heavenly, his hopes eternal. He ought, likewise, to abhor the system of infidelity, than which nothing can be more humiliating to man: a system which reduces him to a level with the brute creation, which gives him neither end, destination, nor hope; and which confines his existence to a small number of fleeting, restless, painful days on earth.

Supposing, therefore, that equal reasons existed on both sides, an elevated mind ought to prefer the more honourable

doctrine: prudence demands this choice. What name, then, shall we affix on the infidel, who having trivial doubts only on his side, and beholding religion supported by authority, prophecy, miracles, examples, prescription, reason, refuses his assent, and chooses rather to consider death as the close of existence, to leave his eternal lot in the hands of chance, and to expose himself deliberately and tranquilly to the most dreadful consequences, namely, to a miserable eternity? My God! is such a man guided by an unbiassed and enlightened reason, or rather is he not hurried on by the dictates of the most hopeless despair?

We will proceed to more cogent reasons. If it be true, that man has nothing to expect after this life, and if it be true, that the earth is his only seat of enjoyment, why is he not happy. Why do not his days, like those of the brute, flow on without disgust, without sorrow, in the enjoyment of flesh and blood? Why is he not satisfied with pleasures? Why cannot unrestrained gratifications fill the vast capacity of his heart? Why is there always something wanting? All other animals are happy in the station in which God has placed them; they joyfully inhabit the woods and fields, without envying the lot of man, whose means of enjoyment are infinitely superior. Man alone pants after more than this earth can afford; man alone is a prey to his restless desires, tormented by his fears, and sorrowful in the midst of pleasures.

And what, O man, is the reason of this? The reason is manifest: we were not made for the earth: we were made for a more happy state: our souls are susceptible of greater enjoyments than the whole world can produce, and nothing less than God can ever satisfy us.

2. In the second place, if all ended with the body, by what means could men of every age and clime have conceived the idea of the immortality of the soul? If man were formed like the brute, for the earth alone, nothing could be more incomprehensible to him than the idea of immortality. Nevertheless, this so extraordinary an idea, so contradictory to the senses, since man dies and is forgotten like the brutes, is established over the whole earth. Savage states, indeed, have been found who live without a mode of worship, but they all expect a futurity, they all figure to themselves a happy region, which their souls will inhabit after death.

Now, let me ask, by what means could men of such different climes, sentiments, and interests, agree on this one point, and all declare themselves immortal? It was not by collusion; for no communication existed between them. It

was not by education; for manners, customs, and habits are not the same in all. The fact is that man convinced himself of the truth: or rather, nature taught him. This is a sentiment infixed in his soul by the Author of his existence, and has continued indelible from the beginning of time.

The origin, therefore, of infidelity, and the reasons on which it is founded are weak and trivial. We will examine the plausibility which they attempt to throw over it, and you shall see that the system, so far from being plausible, is equally repugnant to the idea of an all-wise God, and to the testimony of our conscience.

3. "Is it becoming the majesty of God," they say, "to trouble himself about what passes in the world, to count the virtues or vices of us poor worms of the earth? This would be an occupation which even man would disdain."

Before I expose the impiety of this horrid blasphemy, I must remark, that the greatest indignity to the Supreme Being is offered by the unbeliever himself. For he supposes that the Deity must endure cares, solicitudes, and a studied attention. This is not the case; for as we live, move, and exist in him, every thought and every action of every individual is constantly registered in his eternal mind, and can no more escape his notice, than he can cease to be God.

This truth being acknowledged, I answer, in the first place, that if it be beneath the majesty of God to reward the virtues or punish the vices of us poor worms of the earth, the man who was just, upright, chaste, and pious, would not be more acceptable in his sight than the man who was profane, impure, deceitful, and impious; since the one and the other would share the same fate, and be buried for ever together in the tomb.

This, however, is a small part of the consequences attendant on this blasphemous system. God, so far from looking down with indifference on virtue and vice, would declare himself in favour of the impious. For, him he exalts like the cedars of Lebanon, him he crowns with riches and honours. On the other hand, he seems to forget the just man, he humbles him, he chastises him, he delivers him up to the will of his enemies; for sufferings and contempt are generally the lot of the virtuous on earth. If, therefore, no rewards be in store for virtue, no punishments for vice, in a future state, the Divinity is a protector of adulterers, blasphemers, and of wickedness in the most abominable shapes; he is the persecutor of innocence, of purity, and virtue; his favours attend vice, and his frowns lower over sanctity. Ah! dearly

beloved, what a God of darkness, confusion, and iniquity is created by this system of infidelity!

"Since this God is so just, then," the infidel will say, "how can he punish as crimes those inclinations for pleasures which he himself has implanted in our nature?" To many, perhaps, this argument may appear specious; but a slight examination will be sufficient to prove its fallacy. According to this argument, desire is our own only natural law; inclination is our only rule of conduct. We have only to cast an envious eye on the property of our neighbour, and, strictly speaking, it will be lawful to wrest it from him: we have only to look upon his wife with a corrupted heart, and it will not be criminal to violate the sanctity of matrimony, notwithstanding the most sacred rights of society and nature: in a word, we have only to possess inclinations for every vice, and we may indulge them without remorse; and as no one is free from vicious inclination, no one is debarred from this impious liberty. Oh! how revolting to reason is this doctrine.

But turn to the other side of the question, and do justice to the nature of man, or rather to the Creator who formed him. If the law of our members impel us to sensual enjoyments, we find another law written in our hearts which invites us to chastity and temperance. Of these two opposite laws, why should the unbeliever decide that the one which favours the senses is the most conformable to the nature of man? If, indeed, no one could be found who lived in opposition to this law, he might with some reason argue from its violence and irresistible influence; but there have always been, and there still exist, a multitude of faithful souls, who live in the fear of the Lord, and in the observance of his holy laws. These inherited from nature the same inclinations as the rest of men; the objects of passion are as capable of making an impression on them as on others; they resist them, nevertheless, and so far from lessening their happiness by their resistance, they increase it a hundredfold. The gratification of our passions, therefore, is opposite rather than conformable to our nature.

Hence we must conclude, that it is just on the part of God to punish the transgressors of his law. Here, again, the infidel will say, that "if there be a future state, it will be only for the just; that they perhaps may rise to a life immortal, but that the punishment of the sinner will be, the eternal annihilation of his soul." This is his last resource.

But in vain does he fly to this insecure hold: for what punishment would it be to the sinner to exist no more after

death? He desires annihilation. It is his fondest hope. He lives peaceable in the midst of sensual pleasures, in the agreeable expectation of it. And can it be supposed that a just God will punish the sinner by granting him an end conformable to his desires? No, my beloved: God punishes not in this manner. For where would be the punishment? It would not be the loss of the enjoyment of God; for the infidel neither loves him, nor wishes to enjoy him. It would not be annihilation; for nothing could be more desirable to the wretch, who knows that, after death, he shall exist only to suffer and to expiate the abominations of his past life. It would not be the loss of the pleasures of the world, and of the dear objects of his passions; for he knows that, when he is no more, he can love them no longer. In fact, a more desirable lot could not be devised for the impious: and shall this be the sweet term of all his debaucheries, his blasphemies, and crimes?

No, beloved Christians, no: the hopes of the wicked shall perish, but their crimes shall not perish. Their torments shall be as eternal as their unlawful pleasures would have been, had they been masters of their own destiny. The just Judge, who scrutinizes the heart, will proportionate their sufferings to their offences—immortal flames to pleasures which they would willingly have immortalized: eternity itself will be their only just compensation, their only equitable punishment.

O my friends! let us fly from this chaos of confusion, folly, and madness. Let us entertain a salutary fear of futurity. Do not ask what is done in the other world, but ask yourselves what you are to do in this. Remove the stings of conscience by the innocence of your lives: call in God to your assistance: seek happiness, not in shaking off the yoke of piety, but in tasting how sweet it is. Futurity will never appear to you incredible, if you live not like those unhappy men, who confine all their hopes to the enjoyments of the present life. Then, so far from dreading a world to come, you will long for its approach: you will sigh for that happy hour, when the Son of Man, the Father of the world to come, shall punish the unbelievers, and admit into his kingdom the chosen few, who have lived in the expectation of a happy immortality.

XIII.—FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

"Behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with the waves; and his disciples came to Jesus, and awaked him, saying, Lord save us and he said, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"—*Matt.*, viii, 24.

The conduct of the disciples, as described in this day's gospel, conveys a most instructive lesson to Christians in adversity. They were in the midst of a boisterous sea; they had recourse to Jesus, in their danger; and nevertheless they are rebuked as men of little faith. They are rebuked, not indeed on account of their application to Jesus, but on account of the fear they felt on that occasion. They seemed to forget that God was the author of their present distress, and manifested by their alarms a want of submission to his holy will.

We, like the apostles, are in the midst of a boisterous ocean, and frequently overwhelmed with the waves of tribulation and suffering. On those occasions it is our duty, not only to fly to Jesus for assistance, but, in order to avoid the rebuke which the apostles received, to show no symptoms of alarm or despondency, to consider God as the great Author of all that happens to us, and to be entirely submissive to his will. Ah! were this our disposition, what happy effects would it produce in our souls! It would create cheerfulness in adversity, give merit to our sufferings, sanctify our amusements, moderate our fears, and regulate our hopes. It would impart happiness and contentment to each one in the state in which God has placed him, and, in opposition to every obstacle, enable him to apply every circumstance in life to his own satisfaction.

Seldom, however, is this submission to the will of God to be found among Christians. All are unhappy; all are grieving; all are repining; all seem to think that this constant vicissitude of human things is occasioned, either by chance, or by their own imprudence, or by the malice of others: none attribute them to the decrees of the great Ruler of the Universe. As this subject relates to the happiness of perhaps every individual of this assembly, I will enlarge upon it in this discourse.

The sorrows and disquietudes which are felt from time to time by almost every individual of the human race, arise from

three different sources, namely, anxiety for the future, dissatisfaction during the present moment, and useless regrets for the past. The future creates uneasiness by the fears and hopes which it excites; the present disturbs the mind by the disappointments and cares which attend it; and the past throws a gloom over the soul, by representing to the imagination the sorrowful remembrance of past evils, which time ought to have obliterated.

1. Anxiety respecting the future is, in general, the most bitter alloy of human happiness. Men are wretched, because they will not enjoy the present moment. They anticipate cares and troubles: they dive into the secrets of futurity for causes of uneasiness: they form imaginary phantoms, and frighten themselves with them: not reflecting that they have real grievances in abundance, they trouble themselves about to-morrow: they attend not to the sentence of our Saviour, who says, that "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."—*Matt.*, vi, 34. The more enlightened class of men form to themselves more subjects of uneasiness than the illiterate; the wise are more timid and restless than the simple; and the greater their foresight, the sooner do they descry future evils.

But, dear Christians, the man who throws himself without reserve into the hands of God, by perfect submission to his holy will, is a stranger to the troubles, the cares and solicitudes of the children of the world. He knows that the secrets of futurity are concealed in the bosom of his Providence; and that the power of man can no more change the order of his adorable will, than it can add to his own stature. He is convinced that no danger is incurred by confiding wholly in the power and goodness of his Protector: or rather, he rejoices, he exults, in the assurance that God vouchsafes to interest himself in his behalf: his joy and peace of mind are increased, when the sacred oracles announce that the Lord expressly commands him to trust in his Providence, that he takes on himself the care of the future, and orders him to be solicitous only to sanctify the present by works of piety and religion.

I pretend not to insinuate that religion authorizes sloth and imprudence; and that dependance on God consists in placing such an unlimited confidence in him, as to suppose that he will provide for our future wants without our concurrence. This is by no means the case: the just man trusts in God, but he does not tempt him: he labours as if everything depended on himself, but he awaits the issue of his exertions with placid tranquillity: he knows that his reason must suggest the necessary precautions, but he knows like-

wise that success depends on God alone: he is discriminating in the choice of means, but he is simple and submissive in the expectation of the event: in a word, he is as familiar with a prudent forecast as the worldling, but with this difference, that he never sacrifices his peace and tranquillity of mind.

I should be more correct, if I asserted that the just man alone was provident, and that the prudence of the worldling was purely nominal. This I will prove by comparing the beautiful description given by St. James (*James*, iii, 17), of a Christian and submissive prudence, with a prudence which is merely human.

First, the prudence of the just man, according to the apostle, is chaste and innocent. He acknowledges no other means of attaining his ends, than what conscience allows and religion approves: every species of prudence incompatible with salvation, is, according to him, the height of folly. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is corrupt and criminal: he betrays his conscience in order to attain his ends: he considers only what will be advantageous; and he soon persuades himself that it is innocent.

Secondly, the prudence of the just man is placid. His measures are always calm and mild, because they are subjected to the will of God: he wishes for success inasmuch only as it will be conformable to the will of Heaven. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is turbulent, because he is not resigned to the will of God: he attaches happiness, not to the will of Heaven, but to the success of his plans; and thus his prudence becomes the fruitful source of solicitude and anxiety.

Thirdly, the prudence of the just man is modest. He has no views beyond his state of life: he fixes proper limits to his desires: his ambition is to make himself useful: and thus his moderation is a treasure from whence the sweets of peace and the security of innocence are derived. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is insatiable. He is always forming new projects: his desire knows no bounds: the ill success of his measures is the only subject of his fears: and the risking of his salvation is of little consequence, provided he can attain the object of his pursuit.

Fourthly, the prudence of the just man is humble and docile. He always mistrusts his own powers: he relies more on the assistance of Heaven than on all the precautions of human foresight: and although he neglects nothing on his part, he looks to God alone for success. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is full of self-sufficiency. He relies on his own means for success: he confides in his

own wisdom: he considers only his own strength, as if the Great Disposer of all did not interfere with the things of this world.

Fifthly, the prudence of the just man is simple and without guile. He places not his security in the constant mistrust of his fellow-creatures: he is not disposed to believe evil: he would rather be the victim of the designs of a few, than judge rashly of the thoughts and intentions of many. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is directed by suspicions and mistrust. He places confidence in none: he suspects evil where it does not exist: he imagines that every individual, like himself, is solely intent on his own interest; and, therefore, for his own security, as he thinks, he judges ill of all indiscriminately.

Sixthly, the prudence of the just man is without dissimulation. He has not recourse to artifice: he wishes to deceive no one, and, therefore, he never disguises his real sentiments: his whole attention is devoted to sincerity and candour. The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is a continued duplicity. His lips belie his heart: his countenance is the reverse of his sentiments: he considers himself artful, in proportion as he is crafty: his whole life is a tissue of hypocrisy and deceit. His prudence, therefore, is always attended with uneasiness and restraint, because he can never appear in his true character.

Lastly, the prudence of the just man is pious and compassionate. To human means he adds the practice of virtue and the advantages of prayer; his hopes of success are grounded on the abundance of his alms and on the merits of Christian charity: he discovers in the duties of religion the principal resource and only support of his property. The sinner, on the other hand, considers piety as an obstacle to his prosperity: he rejects the maxims of religion as incompatible with his worldly prospects: and if at any time he puts on the appearance of virtue, it is merely external, in order to attain more easily some favourite object which he has in view.

Thus, continues the apostle from whom I have taken the heads of this description, the prudence of the just man is a never failing source of peace springing up in his soul. Whereas, the prudence of the world, the prudence which cometh not from Heaven, but from the corruption of the sinner, is an uninterrupted torrent of fears, of desires, and of disappointments.

2. The unhappiness of the sinner is occasioned, in the second place, by the pretended evils which prevent his enjoyment of the present time. Could he enjoy the present moment

all would be well; but generally his affections are fixed on things which he does not possess, and his mind is ruffled by every trivial circumstance that thwarts his inclinations. If he has one cause to rejoice, he has others to mourn. If prosperity smile upon him, health is wanting; if he be in health, prosperity refuses its smiles: if health and prosperity be united, the loss of a friend, disappointments, or anxieties prevent the enjoyment of either: if he possess every means of gratifying his inclinations, and no serious cause of uneasiness intervene, still he is not happy, still there is always something wanting; and so unfortunate is he in point of temper and disposition, that a trivial or even an imaginary grievance will throw a gloom over a thousand objects of pleasure, and prevent the enjoyment of all that he possesses.

How preferable, even in a worldly sense, is the state of the true Christian! To him, even in the most trying circumstances, submission to the will of God is an abundant source of consolation. "God is sufficiently powerful," he says, "to support me. It is my duty to allow him to act as he pleases: he has abundant means of satisfying all my wants: and although things may appear desperate in the eyes of men, his power can easily redress them: it is his will that I should hope even when there seems to be no room for hope; for, in proportion as human assistance fails, he will be my protector."

Another motive for this humble and devout submission on the part of the just man, is the knowledge that he subjects himself to the will of a God who is infinitely wise, of a God who has the best motives for every affliction which he sends—who beholds the advantages of the different situations in which he places him—who does nothing by chance, and who knows the effects before he adopts the means. If we decided for ourselves, we might reasonably indulge uneasiness, for we are not sufficiently acquainted with our nature to know what would be the best for us. But God regulates events with consummate wisdom, and although his motives are concealed, they are just and adorable. "I ought not," says the true Christian, "to scrutinize his unsearchable ways with the weak and confined powers of human understanding. I know not where the road will lead to in which he has commanded me to walk; but since he has placed me in it, I will walk on cheerfully and without fear: he frequently leads his faithful servant to the promised land through the dry and fatiguing paths of the desert, and generally conceals his motives in order that he may reap the whole merit of submission."

He reflects, moreover, that he subjects himself to the will

of a tender and merciful God, who loves him, and who has his salvation only in view. If he chastises him, he knows that it is for his salvation; if he spares him, it is for his salvation; if he humbles him, it is for his salvation; if he exalts him, it is likewise for the same beneficent purpose: in a word, in whatever situation he may be, he knows that he leads him as a tender father, directs him as a friend, upholds him as a protector, and walks before him as a guide to direct him in all his ways. He knows that he is a God, whose dispensations to his creatures are directed solely by the dictates of mercy and goodness; that he is a Father, who has no other object but the welfare of his child; and that he is a friend, who has nothing so much at heart as the interest of him whom he loves.

This is honour—this is happiness. Can any condition on earth be more desirable? Ah! if this were the only benefit which piety conferred, the lot of the just and faithful soul is certainly the most rational and happy that any one can wish for in this world.

3. The third source of the unhappiness of man is regret for the past. We are too apt to look back on the misfortunes of our past life with sorrow. Had we acted otherwise, we think, we should have avoided all the evils which embitter our days; or had we seized the advantages which were thrown in our way, we should now be comfortable and happy. The grand science, however, of religion, is to take advantage of the past by contemplating the designs of God over the ways of men. The ancient patriarchs beheld the hand of God in every occurrence; they meditated on the various paths by which his wisdom conducted them through life; and were lost in astonishment at the thought of his inscrutable ways. The sacred historians, likewise, had the Deity only in view. They represent God as the great Disposer of every event; and by them we are taught to consider the various revolutions which have agitated the universe, as the history of the designs and intentions of God upon men. With the same eye the just man looks back on the history of his past life. He sees no cause to lament any misfortune or loss, however serious or afflicting the consequences may be; because he knows that all was directed by the will of an all-wise and merciful Providence. He cannot indeed discover the motives of God, but it is his consolation to reflect, that hereafter he will behold without disguise the adorable ways of Providence in the regulation of every circumstance of his life, and admire the wisdom and goodness with which he made every thing contribute to his sanctification.

These are the benefits which the just man derives from submission to the will of God. Ah! my friends, turn yourselves to what side you please, you will never find rest and peace except in submission. You must will what God wills. This is the great secret of Christian piety; this is the precious treasure of religion; this is the sublime science of the saints. Without this, what is man? He is the sport both of his turbulent passions, and of the perpetual vicissitudes of human things. Chained by the corruption of his heart to present enjoyments, with them he is hurried on with rapidity, and like the figures fixed on a wheel, which are carried round when it is put in motion, he has never an assured permanence. He incessantly wishes to be united to creatures, and is incessantly obliged to tear himself from them. He is always supposing that he has attained the place of rest, and is continually obliged to recommence his pursuit. He is always weary with his toils, and always drawn again into the vortex. In the midst of these his sorrows and regrets, he finds no source of consolation; not in the world, for the world is the great cause of all his evils; not in the testimonies of conscience, for this is the seat of remorse; not in the love of God, for against him he has revolted. He drinks the bitter chalice even to the dregs. In vain does he pour it from one cup into another, says the prophet; that is, in vain does he seek for pleasure by substituting one passion for another: anxiety, remorse, and bitterness pursue him still in every direction: he changes his situation, but he does not diminish his sufferings. "He hath poured it out from this to that," says the royal prophet, "but the dregs thereof are not emptied; all the sinners of the earth shall drink."—*Ps.*, lxxiv, 9.

Great God! why shall not my soul be subjected to thee? Art thou such a hard master that there would be danger in leaving my concerns in thy hands? What have I to fear, if I place my whole dependence on thee? Ah! when I attempted to be myself the director of my affairs, I always failed; the event never corresponded with my wishes and endeavours: I succeeded only in forming to myself new anxieties and disappointments. Thou didst take a pleasure in destroying the building as fast as I erected it. Thou wouldst teach me that man endeavours in vain to build the house, unless thy adorable hand support and raise it. How much more secure is it, my God, to suffer thee alone to act, and to labour only under thy orders. What disquietudes should I have avoided, if I had been attentive to this duty! My condition in life would be the same, but my sufferings would not have been the same. I should have enjoyed here

that peace to which I have hitherto been a stranger, and hereafter, that recompense which thou hast promised to those who on earth desire only the accomplishment of thy will.

XIV.—FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON SALVATION.

"All whatsoever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."—*Col.*, iii, 17.

The advice which the apostle gives in the words of my text cannot be too frequently inculcated in these days of irreligion and immorality. The cares and solicitudes of the world so completely engross our thoughts, and its riches and pleasures are so universally the objects of our conversations and actions, that every other thing is disregarded and forgotten: so earnestly do we labour for the bread that perisheth, that no time is left, no solicitude is felt for the acquisition of the bread which endureth unto life everlasting.

In vain does the Church declare that, if we labour exclusively for what passes with time, our labours are nugatory, and that we are like unto men who spend their time in raising heaps of sand, which roll down again on their heads in proportion as they increase their height. In vain does the Church proclaim that one thing only is worthy of our serious attention, namely, the one which will continue with us during the whole term of our existence. We listen eagerly enough to what the world will tell us; but we never hearken to any of *her* admonitions. Notwithstanding her remonstrances, we labour for these perishable things with as much zeal, earnestness, and vivacity, as if we were labouring for goods which could never be taken from us: and we labour for the real good things of this life with as much languor and indifference as if we were labouring for the things that perish.

What are the causes of this perversity in rational creatures? We are commanded by the apostle to refer all, whatsoever we do in word or in work, to the glory of God; and we refer all to the world. We are commanded to make salvation our great, our only concern; and our great, our only concern is our welfare in the world. The investigation of this subject is of the highest importance, and worthy of your most serious consideration.

1. Salvation is the great, the only business for which we came into this world. Our all for eternity depends on it.

We have, properly speaking, no other thing to do on earth. The various occupations and duties attached to the state of life in which we are placed, are only so many means of attaining this wished-for term.

This is a truth which no Christian can refuse to believe; and yet how little is it attended to! This happy term, to which all actions ought to be referred, is overlooked and neglected. This principal employment, to which all others ought to yield, is the last that gains attention. This amiable occupation, to which all the consolations of Heaven, all the sweets of virtue are annexed, is called tedious and burdensome.

The cause of this fatal neglect may be easily ascertained. We are deluded by the pompous names which the world affixes to the enterprises of ambition and vain glory, and by the honours and titles with which it distinguishes its successful votaries. We are led to believe that actions thus ennobled and applauded are truly great and alone worthy of our notice; we admire them; and in proportion as our admiration of them increases, we entertain a distaste for those more humble exercises—the exercises of piety, which have nothing to recommend them but their merit in the sight of God. This is the first cause of the general decay of piety, and of the little solicitude that is felt for the kingdom of Heaven.

But, my beloved, how degrading even to reason is this unworthy preference which is given to the glory of the world! Yes; *how degrading even to reason!* For, is it not agreeable to every principle of reason, that those actions should appear the most commendable in our sight, which are most entitled to our admiration and esteem? Certainly it is. Now, what is there very commendable in worldly exploits? They will acquire, it is true, a reputation, and perhaps hand down the name of the celebrated hero to the latest posterity. But what is all this? The monuments of pride and ambition will perish with the world that raised them; the victories and conquests which now shine with such lustre in the page of history, will be effaced from the memory of man, and be buried for ever in oblivion. But it is not so with the works of piety. They are worthy of immortality; they will be recorded in the book of life, and survive the wreck of the whole world. The rewards of the one are vain and temporary; those of the other, infinite and eternal. The most sublime occupations of the one, to which prejudice has affixed high-sounding appellations, are trivial and insignificant; those of the other, grand and important. Every action of the just

man is noble and dignified ; the object of his love is the Great Author of his existence—the Sovereign of the universe: he serves an omnipotent Master: he sighs after eternal possessions: he forms projects for gaining Heaven: he labours for an immortal crown. According to every principle, therefore, of right reason, we ought to acknowledge that works which have eternity for their object, are the most noble works in which man can be engaged, and that consequently, they are most entitled to our admiration and applause.

2. Secondly, we are indolent in the great affair of salvation, because we neither make it our principal business, nor give it the preference to our other occupations. We all desire to save our souls: the most abandoned do not renounce this consoling hope: we all perform actions from time to time which have this object solely in view; for we know that Heaven is not to be obtained without some efforts on our part. So far we are consistent with our profession of the Christian faith. But the misfortune is, that we do not proceed far enough. We do not allow the works of piety to hold that rank among the other occupations of our life, to which they are entitled; and we are deficient in our attention to the few works of this kind that we do perform.

A slight inspection into the arrangement of your different employments will convince you of this truth. You have stated times in the day allotted for the duties of your state of life, for the concern of your families, for your recreations and pastimes; but what allotment is there for the great business of salvation? What consideration do you give to that which ought to take place of every other consideration? Does it even enter into the arrangement of your various employments? or, if it does, is it not the first that is omitted to give place to any occupation or hurry of business that occurs? Do you not allow infinitely more to the world, than you do to God? Sometimes, perhaps, you bestow a trifle on the poor: but what is it, when compared with the sums you throw away in idle gratifications and useless expenditure? You, perhaps, lift up your hands to Heaven, and pour forth your souls in fervent supplications to the Lord every morning and night: but when these are concluded, does not the world rush in and engross all your other thoughts? You assist from time to time at the holy mysteries: but is not that act of piety counterbalanced by your subsequent dissipation of mind and inattention to every other spiritual duty? You sometimes, perhaps, perform an act of self-denial, patiently endure an affront, forgive an injury, and mortify the sensual appetite: but are not these solitary acts extraordinary occurrences,

totally distinct from your common line of conduct? You can hardly produce one action done for Heaven, but a thousand may be produced on the other side, which the enemy will claim as done for him. Salvation is a business to which you attend only at vacant moments: the world and your temporal pursuits occupy the far greatest share of your time and thoughts.

But perhaps you will say: "How can it possibly be otherwise? I devote a part of the Sunday to religious exercises: I allot to prayer a short time at morning and night, and more than this I cannot do. My state of life requires that I devote my whole time to business for the support of myself and family." That this may be your state I will not deny: and far be it from me to censure your eagerness to fulfil these duties. But you mistake my meaning; you go upon the supposition that attention to your spiritual concerns is incompatible with the occupations attached to the state of life in which Providence has placed you. This is not the truth. Every domestic duty that you perform may, if you please, be made to promote your sanctification: every Christian virtue may be practised at the time that your hands are at work. Mortification and penance may be exercised when your employments are laborious and disagreeable: clemency and justice, when you are in authority over others: submission to the will of God, when success does not attend your labours, or when any afflicting circumstance befals you: forgiveness of injuries, when you are persecuted, calumniated, or injured either in your person or property; confidence in God alone, when you experience injustice or oppression from those above you.

When, therefore, we say that salvation ought to be your only concern, we do not pretend to insinuate that you must neglect your other duties and abandon every other pursuit. This would be contrary to the designs of God. We only mean to inculcate, that all your actions must be performed with the view of pleasing God; that they must be sanctified by piety, animated by religion, and regulated by the fear of God: in a word, that the procuring the salvation of your souls must be the end and motive of them all. Merit or demerit does not exclusively arise from the *nature* of the actions which you perform, but from the *dispositions of mind* with which you perform them. Application to your temporal duties will either impede or promote your sanctification, according to the spirit with which you are animated. This is the point to which we wish to call your attention: every thing depends on this. But, unhappily, the spirit of piety is a spirit to which the greater number of Christians are strangers; and this may be assigned

as the third cause of your neglecting the only means of insuring your salvation.

3. You are unacquainted with the true spirit of piety. The world and its vanities have made such deep impressions on your minds, that you vainly suppose that there is no other source of enjoyment and delight. You imagine that prayer is attended with no consolation; that retirement is melancholy; that spiritual reading is dull and insipid; that fasting and self-denial are insupportable, and even prejudicial to health; in a word, virtue appears to assume such a forbidding aspect in your eyes, that you shun its embraces; and when you fulfil any duties, you fulfil them in as negligent a manner as if they were so many odious debts, which could only be discharged with a bad grace, and as if it were by constraint.

But, my beloved, this is not the description of true virtue: the ideas that you entertain of it are suggested by your tepidity: the disgust that you feel does not arise from any defect in piety, but from the corruption of your own heart: it is not the chalice of the Lord that is bitter, but it is your taste that is vitiated—to a sick man everything is loathsome. Were you to correct your failings, you would discover that the yoke of the Lord was light; were you to rectify your taste, which has been depraved by sin, you would experience that the Lord was sweet, you would be convinced that virtue was lovely and charming.

If words are not sufficient to remove your doubts on this subject, examine farther. Go to the just man; look into his interior; behold with what delight and joy he applies to these irksome duties, as you call them; put your questions to him; ask him whether his pleasures would be increased were he to intermit his pious exercises, and live, like you, thoughtless and worldly. "Ah!" he would immediately reply, "how little do you know of the sweets of holiness! Could you but taste the happiness I enjoy, you would renounce the listless and insipid life you now lead. From prayer I have learned to draw whatever can be had of pure and heartfelt satisfaction; from works of piety, the most enlivening glow of pleasure; from constant attention to the presence of God whilst my hands are at work, refreshment in the day of heat, and alacrity and joy even under the oppression of the most trying circumstances."

It is from the heart that every pleasure proceeds: that is the seat of all true enjoyment: were your hearts centred in God, you would derive pleasure from the things of God; but, as long as they are centred in the world, depend upon it, you

never can taste any of the sweets of virtue: it is, and must be necessarily, as long as these are your dispositions, irksome and uninviting.

4. The yoke of the Lord appears to be heavy and insupportable likewise on another account, namely, because you are not accustomed to its weight. A few transient moments devoted to the great affair of salvation, a few trivial exercises of piety performed during the day, is the whole of your religion; and when these are fulfilled, you immediately turn from them as from an insipid task, and fly with joy to your worldly pursuits. You allow not sufficient time for grace to alleviate the burden; you lose the sweets and consolations of piety by your impatience and haste. The kine which the Philistines selected to convey the ark of the Lord beyond their frontiers, like those unhappy men who are not accustomed to the yoke of virtue, bellowed, says the scripture, and seemed to groan under the weight of that sacred load; whereas the sons of Levi, being habituated, like the just, to the sacred ministry, carried it with dignity even over the burning sands of the desert, making the air resound at the same time with their canticles of joy and praise.

The law of the Lord is not burdensome to him who is accustomed to fulfil it: the worldly soul alone, who is not familiarized with its holy observances, groans under the lovely weight. When our Saviour assured us that his yoke was sweet and his burden light, he at the same time commanded us to carry it daily. Habituate yourselves, therefore, to the hardships of the cross; and then, after you have given proofs that you possess the fidelity of the just man, you also will experience the comforts and satisfactions that are within him.

5. Lastly, the works of piety are irksome and tedious, because you do not execute them in a proper manner. You pray, but you pray without devotion: you fast, but you enter not into the spirit of compunction and penance: you refrain from injuring an enemy, but you do not love him as a brother: you approach to the holy table, but you possess not fervour, which alone can impart to you the ineffable consolations of the Holy Ghost. Jesus Christ, my beloved, is not divided. The plenitude alone of the law can delight you. The more you retrench from it, the more it will oppress you; the more you endeavour to lighten the weight, the more heavy and fatiguing it will be. On the other side, the more you add to it, the more agreeable you will find it: the more austerities you practise, the greater pleasure you will enjoy. The reason is obvious: the imperfect observance of the law is caused

by the heart not being entirely divested of its passions; and a divided heart, which has two objects of its love, is necessarily, according to the declaration of our Saviour, a kingdom full of interior trouble and disturbance.

Serve then the Lord with your whole hearts, and you will serve him with joy: give yourselves up to him without reserve; make the full sacrifice of all your passions; fulfil the justice of the Lord with strictness, and it will pour the sweet oil of gladness over your souls. Be not deluded by the supposition that the tears of repentance are always bitter and sorrowful: the sorrow is only exterior. The just, like the burning bush of Moses, appear to be surrounded by thorns, but the glory of the Lord is within: you behold their fasts and austerities, but the holy unction which sweetens them all is concealed from your sight: you witness their silence, their retirement, their hatred of the world and its pleasures, but you behold not the invisible Comforter, who abundantly repays them for every sacrifice they offer up to him: in your eyes it seems that they lead a life of melancholy and affliction, it seems that their souls are troubled; but you see not the delight, the peace, and the serenity which reign within. Yes, my beloved, on these chosen vessels of election the Father of mercies and God of all consolation pours his choicest gifts, not only with a full and bounteous hand, but frequently with such profusion, that the soul, unable to endure the plenitude and excess, is obliged to entreat the Lord to restrain the torrent of his favours, and proportion the measure of his gifts to the weakness of his creature.

Make the experiment, by brethren. Put the fidelity of your God to the test. In this he loves to be tempted. Examine whether we have given an unfaithful representation of his mercies, or whether we attempt to allure the sinner by holding out false promises to entice him. Examine this; examine it thoroughly, and you will discover that his gifts are far superior to the description we have given of them. You have already made trial of the world; you have found that it did not correspond with its promises. It engaged to give you pleasures, honours, and happiness; but you found that uneasiness, solicitude, and pain were always your unhappy lot. Come, then, and try whether God will not be more faithful to his word—whether he has promised more than he will give—whether he will be an ungrateful, inconstant, and capricious master. O God! how little deserving wouldst thou be of our hearts, if thou wert not more amiable, more faithful, more worthy of our service, than this wretched world! Make the experiment, my brethren, with sincerity

and ardour, and depend upon it, in a short time you will taste of that cup of pleasure with which every just man has been inebriated in this life: and when you have once tasted, you will find the vanities of the world so insipid, your hearts will be so captivated with the desire of drinking deeper of the cup of divine love, that you will never rest until the happy moment arrives when you will be permitted to drink of the torrents of the delights in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

XV.—SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD.

"We give thanks to God for you all..... being mindful of the work of your faith, and labour, and charity, and of the enduring of the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before God and our Father."—1 *Thess.*, i, 2, 3.

The commendations which the apostle bestows on the Thessalonians in the epistle of this day, express both the sincerity with which they received the word of God, and the piety with which they fulfilled it: "They were a pattern to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia." With humble simplicity they submitted to the law of the gospel; and, in opposition to the dictates of proud reason, they embraced a mode of worship which till then was unknown, and which, even at that time, was rejected as folly by the Gentile, and as a scandal by the Jew. They captivated their understanding to the obedience of faith; and so perfectly did "they serve the living and true God" in spirit and truth, and so widely was the fame of their faith spread over the Church, that it was unnecessary for the apostle to speak anything.

Happy, my beloved friends, should we be, if, like the apostle, we could commend the humble and enlightened simplicity of Christians of the present times—if, like him, we could say, that "we were mindful of the work of their faith, and labour, and charity, and of the enduring of the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ before God and our Father." But it is too true, that although the necessity of paying due homage to the Lord of glory is acknowledged by all, there are few who pay it with sincerity and truth. Some contend that the true worship of God is purely interior, and that the exterior observances of religion are unnecessary and useless. Others fall into the opposite extreme, and place such undue reliance on the observance of exterior duties, as to neglect the essential

property of religion, which consists in the interior purification of the heart.

These dangerous but prevalent opinions I will combat in this discourse. In the first place, I will prove that piety must necessarily extend to the exterior observances of religious worship; and secondly, that piety consists not in exterior observance alone, but must extend to the right government of the passions, and to the removal of every defilement from the heart.

1. True worship, I acknowledge, such as is performed by the angels and saints in Heaven, is purely interior. This is the religion of the just who are gone before us with the sign of faith. But during our abode on earth, the ministry of the exterior senses is indispensable: visible objects are required to awaken our faith, to inflame our love, to cherish our hope, and to excite our attention. This system of religious worship is the only one adapted to our present state. For this reason Abel offered sacrifices; Enos invoked the name of the Lord with exterior ceremony; the patriarchs erected altars; and under the old law, religious practices and observances were multiplied exceedingly. When the new law was established—the law of grace and love—the number of those observances was diminished, but exterior religion was not abolished: even a God became visible amongst us, in order to insinuate himself into our hearts by means of the senses: and the great sacrifice perpetuated on our altars under mystical and visible signs, was intended to be the consolation and exercise of our piety, even to the consummation of the world.

Nevertheless, because it is acknowledged that the worship of God *essentially* depends on the heart, the world presumes to infer that exterior observances are superstitious and unnecessary, and that a man may be moral, upright, sincere, generous, and consequently acceptable in the sight of God, without all that display of religion, without that fasting and abstinence, which only tend to impair the health, and without that scrupulous exactitude in fulfilling certain exercises of devotion, which the cloister, and not the apostles, introduced into the Church. In other words, the wisdom of the world objects against exterior observances of piety, on account of their pretended inutility, their simplicity, and the many abuses to which they are liable.

In the first place, the world pretends that the exterior duties prescribed by religion are useless and unnecessary, because they do not contribute to the purification of the heart. This erroneous principle may be easily refuted. But before I proceed, I will ask, where is the man who, at the time he rejects

the exterior part of religion, is scrupulously exact in the performance of the interior part, which alone, according to him, is essential? Where is the man, whose heart is sincerely devoted to God, at the time that he is exteriorly devoted to the world? Who will dare to say, that he is contrite, humble, penitent, and absorbed in God, at the time he is immersed in worldly pleasures? Ah! the man who has once acquired the interior spirit of piety, never will dispute the necessity of exterior observances. The sacrifice of the passions is the only difficulty in a spiritual life; and when that sacrifice is completed, the exterior exercises of religion are easy and agreeable, and are easily acknowledged to be indispensable.

But let us proceed in the refutation. The same law which commands us to believe with the heart, commands us likewise to confess with our lips, and to give public and avowed testimonies of our faith and piety, first, in order to return glory to God, to whom we belong, and to acknowledge openly that he alone is worthy of our homage and adoration; secondly, in order to avoid the crime of ingratitude, which would attend the concealment of the heavenly blessings with which he favours us; thirdly, in order to be free from the imputation of detaining the truth in injustice, and of behaving with a timidity unworthy of the majesty of the God whom we serve; fourthly, in order to edify our brethren, and stimulate them to virtue by our example; fifthly, in order to encourage the weak, and enable them to withstand the influence of public derision by the display of our own magnanimity; sixthly, in order to make reparation by the odour of a good life for the scandal which our past misconduct has occasioned; seventhly, in order to comfort the just, and to induce them to bless the riches of the mercies of God, which are manifested in our conversion; lastly, in order to confound the enemies of religion, and oblige them to confess that true virtue is still to be found on earth.

These are the good effects produced by the exterior exercises of piety; and that they are indispensable is tacitly acknowledged even by those who declaim against them. For, were the servants of God to adopt the manners and customs of the world, were they to confine their religious duties within the same circle as the declared worldling, they would be the first to ridicule and censure them. "If Heaven is to be gained at that price," they would say, "we ourselves may expect to be saints." Thus do they contradict their own sentiments, and out of their own mouths do they condemn themselves. (*Luke*, xix, 22).

The wisdom of the world, in the second place, objects

against exterior worship, on account of the pretended simplicity and insufficiency of its observances. This regular frequentation of the sacraments, it is said, these set times for prayer, this eagerness in promoting pious undertakings, this zeal in extending the knowledge of the true faith, this respect for the laws of the Church, this exactness in performing certain pious exercises—these, and such like, it is said, are fit only for those bigoted and narrow minds, who cannot attain to that genuine piety which is centred in the heart, and which alone is worthy of man and acceptable to God.

But, my beloved friends, may we not again ask these philosophic Christians, whether this pretended dignity and elevation of sentiment, which they claim exclusively to themselves, and which induces them to despise the humble and simple exercises of exterior piety, be not too frequently debased by the irregularity of their own conduct, and by the mean passions which they indulge. Ah! true it is that the greater number of them are addicted to the most humiliating, the most degrading vices: they are passionate even to excess, and vain even to childishness; they are elated by the least trifle, and depressed by the slightest contradiction; they are guided by the instinct of the senses, like the animals of the field, and they exhibit nothing in their conduct that is either truly great, truly exalted, or truly worthy of the sublimity and powers of reason. These, nevertheless, are the men who proclaim that the exercises of exterior piety are calculated only for weak minds.

True greatness depends on the acquisition of an unrestrained power over the sensual appetites and desires, and on the exercise of a supreme dominion over the rebellious passions and corrupt inclinations. Without this, there is no true greatness; and this is to be found only in that society which is as much overlooked and despised as if it possessed none of the qualities which do honour to the dignity of human nature. Behold the just man! with what sincerity does he pardon the most poignant and malicious injuries! with what fervour does he pray for those who hate and calumniate him! with what horror does he avoid even the appearance of evil! In religion, indeed, he is simple, docile, and humble; and he even glories in his humble obedience and simplicity. He is prudent, like the serpent, with respect to evil; but he is simple, like the dove, with respect to God. These are virtues by which he alone is characterized; and these are virtues which must be united in the same breast, in order to form the perfect man. They, on the other hand, who depreciate his merits, are the sport of the meanest and

most contemptible passions: they are reeds which are shaken by every wind. In religious duties alone they pretend to greatness of soul. They are heroes in their opposition to God; but, in their conflicts with themselves, they are pusillanimous in the highest degree.

The last objection which is urged against exterior worship is taken from the abuses with which it is too frequently accompanied. To this I will reply, that abuses ought to be avoided, and that their existence throws no reproach on piety itself. However, on account of the frequency of abuses in the exterior part of divine worship, I shall call your attention to them in the second part of my discourse.

2. Although the exterior works of piety are profitable, as I have demonstrated above, this is only to be understood when they are accompanied with that spirit of faith and love, without which the flesh profiteth nothing.

The sanctification of the heart is the principal object of every religious duty: if that end be not promoted, our piety is vain. In the sight of God, our only distinguishing characteristic is the heart: we are acceptable to him only inasmuch as we love him: our actions, our desires, our affections, are agreeable to him only inasmuch as they are referred to him. The works which are performed without these dispositions, are unworthy of the upreme Being, and before him are no more than as the sound of brass or the tinkling of a cymbal.

Reliance, however, on exterior works alone, divested of the interior spirit of faith and love, is an abuse which is almost universally diffused. Some people apply themselves sedulously to works of mercy, are affected at the sight of others woes, relieve their distresses, and never fail to distribute alms according to their abilities. This undoubtedly is praiseworthy, and consonant with the precepts of the gospel. But they imagine that this is the whole of their duty. They conclude that, because charity covereth a multitude of sins, the animosities, the dislikes, the detractions, and calumnies to which they are habituated, will not be imputed to them. Others regularly attend at the celebration of the divine mysteries, frequent the sacraments at stated times, are exact in the performance of their morning and evening devotions, and perhaps devote a few moments to prayer at other times in the day. All this is undoubtedly laudable, and even in some degree necessary. But they erroneously suppose, that the whole of piety consists in the regular performance of these exterior duties of religion without any other addition: they serve the Lord faithfully with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from him. At the time that they are offering

up their supplications to Heaven, they are devoted to the world and its pleasures; they are unmortified in their affections, and strangers to self-denial; they are more intent on the acquisition of the mammon of this world, than on the acquisition of a store of good works: they look forward with more pleasure to worldly enjoyments, than to the eternal happiness of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is certainly a delusion, and a delusion of the most dangerous kind. The scripture informs us that the voice of the Lord must be obeyed (1 *Kings*, xv.); and that Heaven is to be gained only by fulfilling his holy will (*Matt.*, vii, 21). If, therefore, they neglect to subdue their passions, to renounce vanity, and to live a truly Christian life, they neglect the essentials of religion; they do no more than display the outward show of piety like the Pharisees, and like them they may be called "whitened sepulchres"—*Matt.*, xxiii, 27, richly ornamented on the outside with religious inscriptions and devices, and decorated with the figures of faith, of piety, of justice, and of mercy; but within, defiled with rottenness and corruption.

In our intercourse with the world, we place little confidence in verbal professions of esteem or friendship: we are little affected by the officious attentions of those whom we know to be our enemies in private: we are attached only to those who favour us with a mutual attachment. And can we suppose that He, who calls himself a jealous God, the God of the heart—can we suppose that he will be satisfied with exterior homage alone? Can we suppose that he has less discernment than men, and that he does not perceive the hypocrisy of our homage and adoration?

How inconsistent even with the ideas of human wisdom is the confidence which the abuse of piety inspires! and yet nothing is more common, and nothing is more prejudicial to the salvation of its unhappy victims. Abandoned wickedness is frequently succeeded by repentance: the remorse and anxiety which haunt the conscience of the depraved libertine, frequently awake him from his sinful lethargy, and dispose his mind to embrace a reform of life. But the regular and exact fulfilment of the exterior duties of religion calms the conscience, and forms, as it were, a cloud over the soul. The deluded Christian is neither alarmed nor excited to repentance by the view of his frailties and defects; because he relies with thoughtless security on the mass of unprofitable good works which he has accumulated. The confidence with which he is inspired by this supposed treasure, fixes his soul in a state of dreadful tranquility, out of which, in all probability, he will never be awakened. Thus it was with the

Jewish people. They were strict observers of the external works of the law, and they persevered in their iniquities even to the end. The prophets, whom the Lord raised up from time to time, endeavoured with the greatest earnestness to undeceive them on this subject. Confide not, they said, in the multitude of your victims and offerings. Trust not in your works and legal observances. The Lord requires, before all other things, a pure heart, a sincere repentance, a cessation from sin, a true love of his commandments, a holy and innocent life: "Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and take away evil out of the midst of you." Their remonstrances, nevertheless, were ineffectual: the temple, the altar, the sacrifices gave them confidence, and closed their eyes to their injustices, their fornications, and defilements. On other occasions, when they had fallen into idolatry, and openly rejected the God of their forefathers, the prophets reclaimed them with ease; but when they were strict observers of the law, remonstrances were in vain; they thought that they were perfect, and would not believe that more was required of them. On the same account, publicans and sinners were converted by the preaching of Christ; but the Pharisees, the men who resembled these half Christians, who were at the same time worldly and devout, who united the exercises of piety with the pleasures, the maxims, the passions, and the excesses of the world, were not converted, but died without compunction, in the same manner as they had lived, without apprehension or fear.

Ah! if the precepts of the Christian religion extended no farther than to exterior duties, never would a pagan writer have declared that their sublimity and perfection surpassed the powers of human nature. Exterior duties are performed with little or no difficulty. Easy would be the acquisition of Heaven, if nothing more was required. The sublimity of the Christian rule consists in the interior duties which it exacts —in the renunciation of self-will—in the regulation of the passions—in the forgiveness of injuries—in the love of the most inveterate enemies—in the government of the tongue—in meekness, patience, and resignation under the severest trials—in the exercise of universal charity—and above all, in the decided preferment of the will of God on all occasions, before all the pleasures and vanities of the world. These are the difficulties of a Christian life: these constitute its sublimity and perfection: these inspired the heathens with the highest ideas of the sanctity, the dignity, the wisdom of the moral code of Jesus Christ. Whereas exterior works alone, instead of being sublime, are vain and trifling; and instead

of repressing the ardour of self-love, they increase it, and are on this very account performed by many, whilst the essential duties of religion are neglected. This is the last abuse which I shall remark.

Exterior works are good and necessary, as I have already demonstrated; but it is criminal to give them the preference before the more indispensable obligations. This abuse is very common: many Christians, who profess to live in the fear of God, perform extraordinary works of virtue through no other motive than because their vanity is flattered by the public approbation which they receive, and at the same time neglect the more humble duties, because they have nothing to recommend them but their merit in the eyes of the Supreme Being. Thus, for example, they distribute their largesses to the poor, and without scruple defer the restitutions which the law of God requires at their hands. They spend that time in prayer which ought to be devoted to their domestic concerns. They effect reconciliations between contending neighbours, and cause dissensions at home by their own capricious deportment. They condescend to visit and console the poor afflicted members of Christ, and refuse to make the least advances to their own enemy, in order to induce him to a reconciliation and to gain him over to Christ. They impose on themselves a daily task, consisting of a variety of prayers, and with the same tongue with which they praise the Lord, they wound the reputation of their neighbour by backbiting and detraction; thus demonstrating that their religion is vain, and that they deceive themselves.

True piety requires that, in the first place, all the obligations peculiar to your state and condition in life be fulfilled. If you build not on this foundation, your works are dead, and, like stubble, destined only for the fire. The essence of a truly Christian life consists in the faithful performance of every duty. When these are completed, you may acquire merit from extraordinary works of virtue. But you must never prefer the unnecessary before the indispensable, your own caprice before the law of God, or the chimerical perfection of piety before piety itself.

Avoid, therefore, with care, the two fatal rocks which I have described: neglect not the exterior observances of religion, and confine not your piety to them alone. True and solid virtue always keeps the just and equitable medium; caprice alone adopts extremes. Far be it from you to attempt to make any improvements in religion: piety is rational and sublime, provided you leave it in its present state: but if you pretend to purify it by the fancies of your own imagination,

you will cause it to degenerate into a philosophic piety, which affords no consolatory encouragement to the mind, or into a blind and superstitious zeal, which reason despises, and which pure religion disavows and condemns.

Let us all unite, my beloved, and by our strict attention to every social, domestic, and religious duty, convince the world that piety is not the offspring of weakness or caprice, but that it is the only proper rule of conduct, the only ornament of reason, and the only wisdom which ennobles the mind of man. Let us enter into the spirit of the maxims of our holy religion; and let us extort the confession even from the enemies of our holy faith, that piety alone can give dignity and elevation to our sentiments, and that no people are so mean and puerile, as they who are guided and enslaved by their passions. Let us exalt piety to honour, by leaving it in possession of its divine and amiable qualities—its meekness—its equity—its wisdom—its excellence—its equanimity—its disinterestedness —its sublimity. Men, prejudiced as they are, will soon unite their suffrages in its favour, when they behold it in its true state, divested of our weakness and defects. Thus shall we cause the name of the Lord to be praised even by those who know him not: and then we may reasonably hope to be united with them hereafter in a blissful immortality.

XVI.—SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

"Many are called, but few are chosen."—*Matt.*, xx, 16.

This, my beloved brethren, is a sentence, which is seldom reflected on with that serious attention which its importance requires. It is generally supposed that salvation is attainable at a much easier rate than we represent it to be; and that the number of the elect far surpasses the number of the reprobate. But the words of my text declare, that "many are called, but few are chosen."

Were it my intention to strike terror into your minds, instead of consulting your improvement by instruction, I would in this discourse enumerate the alarming examples with which the scriptures are filled on this subject: I would tell you, that the prophet Isaias compares the small number of the elect to the few bunches of grapes which escape the eye of the vintager; to the few ears of corn which chance only preserves from the sickle of the reaper. I would tell

you, in the words of God himself, that there are two paths; the one, narrow, rugged, strewed with thorns, and frequented by very few—the other, broad, spacious, adorned with flowers, and trodden by the far greater part of mankind. I would tell you, that the gospel unreservedly declares, that perdition is the fate of the multitude, and that the number of the elect bears no comparison with the number of the reprobate.

But what profit would you reap from this discourse, were I to confine my observations to this subject alone? You would be informed of the danger, and you would not be acquainted with the means of escape. You would behold the sword of God's wrath lifted over your heads, and you would not be empowered to avert the stroke. Your peace of mind would be destroyed, and you would not discover the irregularities of your moral conduct.

For your instruction, therefore, I will examine the causes why the number of the elect is so small. I will apply the subject individually to ourselves, and examine the foundation on which your hopes of salvation are established. Banish all foreign thoughts from your minds, and attend solely to my words. The subject is important, if any subject can be so, and more immediately relating to the concerns of your real and immortal welfare than anything, I believe, that has ever before occupied your attention.

1. The elect of God will be composed of people of two different descriptions; of those who have been so happy as to preserve their innocence spotless and undefiled by mortal sin, and of those who have regained their lost innocence by suitable works of penance. These are the elect. Heaven is open only to the innocent and to the truly penitent. Now, my brethren, of which description are you? Are you of the number of the innocent, or are you of the number of the penitent? Faith assures you that nothing defiled can enter Heaven. You must consequently either have avoided every defilement, or your defilements must have been washed away by sincere repentance. The first is a privilege which is enjoyed by very few; and the second requires a grace which, in the present general relaxation of morals and discipline, is either seldom received or seldom corresponded with.

In those happy times when the Church was an assembly of saints, few of the faithful who had been cleansed by the laver of regeneration, and had received the Holy Ghost, relapsed into their former ways. Ananias and Sapphira were the only prevaricators we read of in the church of Jerusalem: one incestuous man only is recorded to have dishonoured the church

of Corinth. Seldom was it necessary to subject a disciple to the rigour of canonical penance; or, at least, the number of lepers, who were banished from the presence of the altar and separated from the society of their brethren, was very small in comparison with the rest of the faithful.

But those times are elapsed; and great is the change that has taken place. The Gospel indeed has extended its empire. but the reign of piety is confined within narrower boundaries: the number of believers is increased, but the number of the just is diminished; the world is the same now as it was from the beginning—corrupt and profligate; its conversion to the faith has produced no change in its manners and customs. When it entered the Church, it introduced likewise its immorality and profaneness. Yes, my beloved, true it is that the land, even the land of Christianity, is infected by the corruption of its inhabitants; all work iniquity, and seldom is there one who does good. Injustice, calumny, lying, adultery, and crimes of the blackest hue, lay waste the fair inheritance of Christ; hatreds are perpetual; reconciliations are seldom sincere; an enemy is seldom loved; detractions, and censures on the conduct of others, are indulged on all occasions; and the gifts which God intended for the support of the corporal frame, are abused by excesses too shameful for description.

All states and conditions have corrupted their ways. The poor murmur against the rich: the rich forget the Author of their abundance; the great seem to exist only for themselves; and licentiousness is made the privilege of their independent station. Even the lamps of Jacob are extinguished: the salt has lost its savour: the priest has become like unto the people.

Behold, my brethren, the state of Christianity. And, my God! is this thy Church, thy Spouse, thy beloved inheritance? Is this thy delightful vineyard, the object of thy tenderest care? Ah! more heinous or more enormous crimes were not committed in Jerusalem, when thou pronouncedst against it the sentence of its condemnation.

Thus, one gate, the gate of innocence, is irrevocably shut against us. We have all gone astray. There probably was a time when sin defiled the heart of every individual of this assembly. The impetuosity of the passions has perhaps subsided in some; the world has perhaps become disgusting to others; grace, perhaps, has wrought the conversion of others; but there probably was a period which we all look back upon with regret, and would gladly consent that it were for ever blotted out from the history of our lives.

But why do I lose my time in attempting to prove the loss of our baptismal innocence? We know that we are sinners; we dread the scrutinizing eye of an omniscient God; and we have too much reason to fear that he beholds innumerable stains even in that part of our lives which appears to us unsullied by any crime. It is vain, therefore, to claim Heaven on the score of innocence: consequently, there is only one road to salvation left, which is that of penance. After the shipwreck of sin, this is the only plank, say the holy fathers, that can save us.

2. Now let me ask, where are the penitents in this assembly? Are their numbers considerable? There are more, said a holy father, who never lost their baptismal innocence, than have recovered it again by true repentance. A dreadful sentence, my dear brethren, but, I hope, not to be too strictly enforced, however respectable the authority. We will not run into extremes. There are sufficient motives for alarm in the exposition of the known truth, without adding to them by unnecessary declamations. Let us only examine, whether the greater number of us have any right to expect eternal happiness on the score of repentance.

In the first place, what is a penitent? A penitent, says Tertullian, is one who every hour calls to mind in the bitterness of his soul the sins of his past life—who takes part with the justice of God against himself, and renounces innocent pleasures in order to atone for the criminal excesses which he formerly committed. A penitent is one who treats his body as an obstinate enemy—as a rebel, whom he must bring into subjection—as a dishonest debtor, from whom he must exact the last farthing. A penitent is one who considers himself as a malefactor condemned by the justice of God to death, and is convinced that his only portion in this life ought to be sufferings and contempt. A penitent is one who is ready to submit to the loss of health and property, as to the just privations of blessings which he has criminally abused—to crosses and afflictions, as to a punishment due to him on account of his transgressions—to corporal pains, as to a foretaste of the eternal torments which his sins have deserved. This is the description of a true penitent. Now let me ask, where are the men in this assembly who answer this description?

Are they prostrate in the porch of the temple? Are they covered with sackcloth and ashes? Do they supplicate the brethren, who are entitled to enter the sanctuary, to offer up their prayers to the Father of mercies in their behalf? Have they spent whole years in the exercises of prayer, of

fasting, of mortification, and of other penitential austerities? Are they excluded from the Church, and forbidden to assist at the celebration of the tremendous mysteries? Are they treated as the outcast of men, and deprived of every consolation but that of their tears and repentance? This, at least, was the course of atonement prescribed to the ancient penitents, and scrupulously fulfilled by them.

I admit that the Church has long since authorized a relaxation of this discipline; and my motive for hinting at the severities of those times, was not to lead you into a supposition that the observance of them was still necessary, or to cast reflections on the mild condescension of the Church in abolishing them, but to stigmatize the general corruption of the Christian world which rendered the abolition necessary. External discipline must be accommodated to the manners and customs of the times. But although laws framed by men are liable to change, the laws of penance are founded on the gospel, and can never change. We may satisfy the Church without the rigours of *public* penance; but we cannot satisfy either the Church or God, unless by our *private* penance we make full atonement for our crimes.

Now, my brethren, what is your private penance? Is it proportionate to the penance of the primitive Christians? Is it proportionate to the number and the enormity of your sins? You, perhaps, may say, that you endure the cares and anxieties inseparable from your state of life: that solicitude for the present and future well-being of yourselves and families embitters your days; that you labour from morning till night, and that, in spite of all your endeavours, you are frequently the victims of want, of wretchedness, of infirmities, and of other numberless evils. This, perhaps, may be true. But do you submit to these trials with a truly Christian spirit, without murmurings, without complaints? Do you submit to them in the spirit of penance, and offer them up to God as an atonement for your sins? If not, they will be found deficient in the scales of unerring justice, and they will not be entitled to a reward. But, supposing that you did not offend in any of these points, would you rank in the number of penitents? Would nothing more be required of you? Your merit, I allow, would be great. You would offer up an acceptable sacrifice of atonement to the justice of God. But would his justice be completely satisfied? The primitive Christians endured the ordinary trials of life with patience, and, in addition, submitted to all the rigours of canonical penance, and yet did not do too much. Can your reconciliation be effected by easier means? Are not voluntary

mortifications in private required of you. You know that the penance of every individual must be proportionate to his guilt: and can you reasonably entertain hopes of salvation, when your own penance is not regulated according to this maxim? Oh! be not deceived. The ways of repentance are far more painful than you imagine: the road to Heaven presents far greater difficulties to the sinner than you have hitherto experienced. This is the real truth; and yet you spend your days in perfect tranquillity and peace!

You are not, indeed, singular in this respect. You do nothing more than follow the example of a great majority of your fellow Christians. You are not more attached to worldly pleasures, more adverse to sufferings and crosses, more deficient in the works of repentance, than they. I allow that there are men of more dissolute characters: for I will not suppose that you are either destitute of religion, or unconcerned about salvation: but where are the men that are more penitent? Alas! the few that are of this description, I fear, are chiefly to be found in the shades of sequestered solitude. Amongst the people of the world there is only a small number, who, by a little stricter attention to religious duties, attract the notice, and perhaps the censures and ridicule, of the public. All the rest tread the same beaten path; children inherit the false security of their parents; seldom is there one that lives innocent; and seldom is there one that dies penitent. Good God! if thou hast not deceived us—if every precept of the gospel must be fulfilled to an iota—if the number of the reprobate will not induce thee to relax something of the severity of thy law, what becomes of that multitude of people which daily drop into eternity before our eyes! What is become of our parents, our relations, our friends! What is their eternal lot!

Formerly, when a prophet complained to the Lord that all Israel had abandoned his alliance, the Lord assured him, that he had reserved to himself seven thousand men, who had not bent their knee before Baal. But can the faithful servants of Jesus be comforted with the same assurance in these days? There are undoubtedly many chosen vessels of election; the priesthood, the army, the court, the cottage have their ornaments—men according to God's own heart, with whom he delighteth to dwell; for the world exists only for the sake of the elect, and when their number is complete, the final dissolution will take place. But how few are they, when compared with that immense multitude which is hurried headlong into the deep abyss!

3. You, perhaps, have been encouraged to rely with

confidence on your state, and to conclude that nothing more was required of you, because you perceived that you were as regular, as moral, as attentive to your duty as other people. But, my beloved, this, instead of being a subject of consolation, ought to strike you with dismay. Others, that is the generality of people, live in a state of tepidity and spiritual sloth; they are the slaves of pride and vain-glory: they are addicted to detraction, hatred, and other vices; they love neither God nor their neighbour in the manner they ought; in a word, they walk in the broad road that leadeth to damnation. And can you imagine that you are secure, because you walk in the same path with them? The small number of the elect walk in the narrow path: their lives are regulated, not by the conduct of the multitude, but by the precepts of the gospel: their fervent piety, their strict morality, their penitential austerity, exalt them far above the rank of other people: they are, and have been in every age, men of singular lives: they shine like lights in the midst of darkness; they are spectacles worthy both of angels and men: they hold in abhorrence the ways, the maxims, the pleasures, and the vanities of the world: they live, says St. Paul, not they, but Christ liveth in them.

Perhaps, you will say, that the saints are exceptions to the general rule, worthy indeed of your admiration, but not fit for your imitation. That they are exceptions, I will readily allow. But they are exceptions only from that general rule of walking in the broad road of perdition. A chosen soul, in the midst of the world, must necessarily be an exception. Are we then obliged to walk in the footsteps of the saints? We are. It is the duty of every one to be holy and to be a saint. Heaven is open only to saints. There is no other gospel to be followed, no other duties to be fulfilled, no other promises to be hoped for, than those proposed to the saints. Every one is obliged to love God above all things, and his neighbour as himself: every one is obliged to seek Heaven in the first place, to be meek and humble of heart, to comply with every precept of the gospel, to avoid sin as the greatest of all evils, and to do condign works of penance for the sins into which he has fallen: every one is obliged to do good, to advance forward in the ways of virtue, and to be perfect, as his Heavenly Father is perfect. These are obligations imposed on all: these are the same that were imposed on the saints: and the fulfilling them alone made them saints. Oh! if there were an easier road to Heaven, it would certainly have been pointed out to us; it would have been traced out in the gospel; there would have been saints who would have

walked it, and encouragements would have been held out to us by the Church to follow their easy example. But you know that there has been nothing of the kind. Good God! how little do men consult the dictates of reason when their eternal salvation is at stake!

Be not, therefore, lulled into a fatal security by the assurance that you are as virtuous as other people. On the contrary, beware of the multitude: walk not with the multitude, lest you share the same fate. Take your model from the saints, and imitate their virtues and sanctity. If you are innocent, continue to fulfil every precept of the gospel, and by self-denial and prayer prepare yourselves for future temptations. If you are sinners, bewail your sins without ceasing; water your couch every night with your tears; put on the weeds of mourning; and anticipate the judgments of God by mortification and penance. Enter on this penitential time. Be not seduced by the examples of the impenitent; but, with the chosen few, devote both body and soul to the painful works of fasting and penance. Then you may confidently hope that you will receive the reward promised to the truly penitent, and you will be united to their company hereafter in the joys of a blissful immortality.

XVII.—SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

"A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way side ....and other some fell upon a rock....and other some fell among thorns.... and other some fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit a hundred fold."—*Luke*, viii, 5, 8.

Our attention, my beloved, is again awakened by a repetition of the dreadful truths which were the subject of my last discourse. In this parable, the elect and the reprobate are plainly designated; and the comparatively small number of the elect is discernible to the slightest observer. In the first place, out of that immense multitude of people who either know not God, or refuse obedience to his authority, and throw off the restraints of religion, none are chosen; the parable does not even notice them: and the reason is, because, according to the scripture, they who believe not are already judged. In the second place, out of the seed which God had sown in his Church, watered with the dews of Heaven, and nourished with the manure of his holy word, only one of the

four parts described forms the number of the elect. The man who hears the word of God, but never follows it in practice, is rejected. The man whose sloth and tepidity, like the dryness of a rock, prevent the word of God from taking root in his soul, and whose only efforts for salvation consist in attending at the service of the Church, and in performing a few exercises of devotion without the spirit and without the fervour of divine love, is rejected. The man whose heart is divided between God and the world, and whose entanglement in the thorns of riches and pleasures draws off his attention from the duties of religion, is rejected. He alone who hears the word of God and keeps it—he alone who seeks the kingdom of Heaven in the first place, and makes salvation the great business of his life—he alone who, notwithstanding the opposition of his own nature, and the influence of public example, serves his Maker in spirit and in truth, and brings forth fruit in patience—he alone is admitted into the number of the elect, and entitled to the rewards prepared for the saints.

But, my brethren, where shall we find men of this description? That you may be enabled to form an idea of the comparative smallness of their number, I will describe in detail the obligations of a Christian, and I will examine how far they are observed by mankind in general. Be attentive, for the subject is applicable to every individual in this assembly.

1. By the title and character of Christian, which we bear, we are obliged to renounce the world and all its pomps, the devil and all his works, the flesh and all its concupiscences These are our engagements. These are the essential articles of the treaty concluded between us and God. On the fulfilment of these we shall be entitled to the promises, and not otherwise.

In the first place, we engaged in baptism to renounce the world and all its pomps. This engagement we made at the foot of the altar of God; the Church witnessed and sealed it, and on this condition alone received us into the society of the faithful.

But what is this world which we engaged to renounce? I reply, that it is the world to which the greater part of mankind are attached, and by this mark we may always distinguish it. The world is that multitude of sinners, whose desires and fears, whose hopes and solicitudes, whose joys and griefs are excited by the goods or evils of this life alone. The world is that great portion of the human race, who fix their affections on the earth, as if it were their true country; who

dread the world to come, as if it were a land of banishment; who are less anxious about their eternal inheritance, than about their temporal pursuits; who consider death as the greatest of all evils—the extinction of every hope and the end of every enjoyment. The world is that temporal kingdom, where Christ is not known, or, if he be known, is not glorified as God; where his maxims are reprobated, his faithful servants despised, his blessings abused, his sacraments neglected or profaned, his worship abandoned. This is the world which we have engaged to renounce, to avoid, to hate, to oppose by our good example, and to resist with all our heart and mind, and strength. This is the world which ought to be crucified to us—that is, ought to be the object of our aversion, and to which we ought to be crucified—that is, ought to be the objects of its censures and ridicules.

Now, my beloved, in what manner do we fulfil this engagement? Do we loathe the enjoyments of the world? Are we grieved at the sight of its abominations and crimes? Do we sigh after our true country, and lament that the time of our pilgrimage is prolonged? Do we wish to be dissolved and to be with Christ?

No: we do nothing of the kind; or rather, we do directly the reverse. Our thoughts and affections are centred in the world; its laws are our laws; its maxims are our maxims; we condemn what it condemns; and we commend what it commends. When I say *we*, I mean the generality of Christians. I know that there are many who complain bitterly of the world; who accuse it of injustice, ingratitude, and caprice; who discharge upon it the coldest venom of invective; and who describe its errors and abuses in the strongest terms. But, notwithstanding all this, they still continue to love it; they court its favours; they cannot live without it. Where is the man who can say from his heart that he hates the world, and that he has renounced its pleasures, its customs, its maxims, and its expectations. All are pledged, all, without exception, have entered into a most solemn covenant to do this, and not one will do it.

We engaged, in the second place, to renounce the flesh and all its irregular inclinations and desires: that is to say, we engaged to shun indolence and sensuality, to resist the cravings of a corrupted heart, to chastise the body, to crucify it, and to bring it into subjection. This was our vow; and we are obliged to fulfil it: it is one of our principal duties: it is inseparable from the character of a Christian. And by whom is it fulfilled.

Lastly, we engaged to renounce the devil and all his works.

If it be asked, what these works are, I reply, that they are the works which form the history of the most considerable part of our lives. They are ambition, pride, hypocrisy, vain-glory, and deceit: they are fraud, injustice, double-dealing, and lies: they are hatred, dissensions, envy, and jealousy: they are worldly pomp and show, plays, comedies, and unprofitable parties of pleasure.

"What!" methinks I hear you say, "is the Christian to be debarred the theatres, and other public places of resort? Certainly, if his innocence be exposed to danger. Every action that we perform must have for its object the greater honour and glory of God, or it is not innocent. Every work that is not placed to our account in the book of life, is recorded against us. The weakness of human nature, indeed, requires pastimes and relaxations; but those pastimes and relaxations only are innocent, which may be referred to the honour of God, and which will enable us to apply with more vigour to our more holy and more serious duties.

Now, according to this universally received point of Christian morality, I leave you to decide whether the public amusements above mentioned are innocent or not. Do they unbend the mind only for a time, and thereby enable it to apply with more earnestness to the great affair of salvation? Can they be referred to the greater honour and glory of God? Is it possible to frequent them through motives of religion and virtue? No: the most profane Christian would blush to make the assertion. Consequently, your innocence is not only endangered, but injured by them; and, consequently, as often as you frequent them, you violate the sacred engagement to renounce the devil and all his works which you contracted in baptism, and which you ratify by your public profession of the Christian faith.

2. These, my brethren, are our baptismal vows. They are not matter of counsel only: they are what we call pious practices. They are obligations the most essential—the most indispensable. And yet how few observe them! how few give them a place in their thoughts! Ah! did you but seriously reflect on the extent of the duties which the name of Christian imposes on you—were you but once thoroughly convinced that you are obliged to hate the world and all that is not God, to live the life of faith, to maintain a constant watchfulness over your senses, to be conformed to Christ crucified—did you but seriously consider, that the great command of loving God with your whole heart and strength, is violated by every thought, every action, which is not referred to him; oh! you would be seized with fear and trembling;

you would shudder at the sight of the immense chaos which your infidelities have formed between you and God; you would exclaim with astonishment: "Who can be saved? if these are our duties—if this constant watchfulness, this pure and fervent love are required of every individual, who can be saved?" This would be your exclamation; and I would immediately answer: "Very few indeed will be saved: you will not be saved unless you reform your lives; they who live like you will not be saved; the multitude will not be saved."

Who then will be saved? The man who, in these days of irreligion and vice, walks in the footsteps of the primitive Christian—"whose hands are innocent, and whose heart is pure; who has not received his soul in vain"—*Ps.*, xxiii. 4; who has successfully struggled against the torrent of worldly example, and purified his soul; who is a lover of justice, "and swears not deceitfully against his neighbour"—*ib.*, who is not indebted to double dealing for an increase of fortune; who returns good for evil, and heaps favours on the enemy that had laboured for his destruction; who is candid and sincere, and never sacrifices truth to interest, nor conscience to civility; who is charitable to all in distress, and a friend to all in affliction; who is resigned in adversity, and penitent even in prosperity.

He, my dear brethren, will be saved, and he only. Oh! how alarming is this truth! And nevertheless, all—the chosen few only excepted, who work out their salvation with fear and trembling—all, I say, live on in the greatest peace and tranquillity of mind. They know that the greater number is lost; but they flatter themselves with the assurance that, although they live like the world, they shall die like the just: each one supposes that God will favour him with a particular grace; each one looks forward with confidence to a happy death.

These are *your* expectations likewise. I will therefore say no more about the rest of mankind, but address myself solely to you as if you were the only inhabitants of the earth. Now this is the thought which occupies my mind, and strikes terror into the very centre of my soul. I suppose that the last day is arrived; that the trumpet has sounded; that you are risen from the dead; that you are assembled together in this place, to await the coming of the great Judge; that the heavens are about to open; and that you will shortly behold the Son of Man descending with great power and majesty to pronounce upon you the sentence either of election or reprobation.

Rouse your attention, my brethren. Are your accounts in

order? Are you prepared for the trial? Are you ready to meet your Judge? Do not say that you will prepare yourselves hereafter. This is a delusive hope. What you are now, the same will you probably be at the hour of death. The intention of reforming your conduct, which has so long occupied your thoughts without effect, will continue without effect as long as you live. This is testified by the experience of ages.

Now I ask you—I ask you with dismay, and without meaning to separate my lot from yours—Were the Son of Man to appear in this assembly, and separate the good from the bad, the innocent from the guilty, the penitent from the impenitent, how many would he place on his right hand? Would he place the greater number of us? Would he place one half? Formerly he could not find ten just men in five populous cities; and could he find as many, do you think in this assembly? How many, then, would he place on his right? You cannot give an answer, neither can I. Thou alone, my God, knowest thy elect, thy chosen few.

But if we cannot say who will be placed on his right hand, we can say at least that sinners will be placed on his left. Who, then, are sinners? They may be divided into four classes. Let every individual attend, and examine whether he may not be ranked in one of them. 1. They who are immersed in vice, and will not reform. 2. They who intend to reform, but defer their conversion. 3. They who fall into their former habits as often as they pretend to renounce them. 4. They who think that they need not a change of life. These are the reprobate: separate them from the rest of this assembly, for they will be separated from them at the last day. Now, ye chosen servants of my God—ye remnant of Israel, lift up your heads; your salvation is at hand: pass to the right: separate yourselves from this chaff, which is destined for the fire. O God! where are thy elect! How few of us will be comprehended in the number!

Beloved Christians, our perdition is almost certain; and why are we not alarmed? If a voice from Heaven were heard in this temple, proclaiming aloud that one of us here present would be consigned to eternal flames, without disclosing the name, who would not tremble for himself?—who would not examine into the state of his soul?—who would not, like the apostles at the last supper, turn to Jesus, and say: "Is it I, Lord?" And, if time were still at our disposal, who would not endeavour to secure his own soul by the tears and sighs of repentance?

Where then is our prudence? Perhaps not more than ten

of my present auditory will be saved; perhaps not even so many; perhaps.....But, O God! I dare not, I cannot fix my eyes on the dreadful, unfathomable abyss of thy justice: perhaps not more than one of us will see Heaven. And yet, we all flatter ourselves that we shall be the happy souls that will escape: we all imagine, without considering either our virtues or vices, that God will have mercy on us in preference even to those who are more innocent and deserving.

Good God! how little are the terrors of thy justice known in the world! The elect in every age withered away through fear, when they contemplated the severity and the depth of thy judgments on the sins of men. Holy solitaries, after a life of the severest penance, were terrified at the thought, and when stretched on the bed of death, shook their hard couch of poverty and mortification by the trembling motions of their emaciated frame. They turned towards their weeping brethren, and with a faltering and dying voice asked them: "Do you think that the Lord will have mercy on me?" Their fears bordered on despair, and their minds were in the greatest agitation, until Jesus himself appeased the storm, and produced a calm. But now, the man who has lived like the multitude, who has been worldly, profane, sensual, and unthinking, dies with the assurance of a happy immortality: and the minister of God, when summoned to attend him, is necessitated to cherish this false confidence, to speak only of the infinite treasures of the mercies of God, and in some measure to aid and assist him in deceiving himself. Good God! what wrath is stored up by thy justice against the day of wrath!

What conclusion, my beloved, are you to draw from these alarming truths? That you are to despair of salvation? God forbid. The impious man alone, in order to indulge his passions with less restraint, endeavours to convince himself that salvation is unattainable, and that all mankind will perish with him. My object is, that you should be undeceived respecting that almost universally received opinion, that it is not unlawful to do what is done by others, and that universal custom is a sufficient rule for your conduct. My object is, that you should be convinced, that in order to be saved, you must live in a different manner from the generality of mankind, that your piety must be singular, and that you must be separated from the multitude.

When the captive Jews were on the point of departing from their beloved country for the land of bondage—the great Babylon—the prophet Jeremiah, who was commanded by God to remain in Jerusalem, addressed them in words to

this purport: Children of Israel, when you arrive in Babylon, you will behold their gods of silver and gold borne on the shoulders of the inhabitants, and the multitude before and behind adoring them; but do not you imitate their example; on the contrary, say in your hearts: "Thou alone, O Lord, are worthy to be adored."—*Bar.*, vi, 6.

My advice to you at parting is nearly in the same words; and I earnestly exhort you never for a moment to lose sight of it. As soon as you have left the house of God, you will find yourselves in the midst of Babylon. You will behold the idols of gold and silver, before which are prostrated the greater part of mankind: you will see the gods of this world—wealth, glory, and pleasure, surrounded by their votaries and adorers: you will witness abuses, errors, and disorders, authorized by universal example. Then, my beloved brethren, if you are Israelites indeed, you must turn to God, and say: "Thou alone art worthy to be adored." I will not take part with people who are strangers to thee: I will follow no other law but thine. The gods which the senseless multitude adores are not gods; they are the work of men's hands, and they shall perish with them. Thou only art immortal: thou alone are worthy to be adored. The laws of Babylon have no connection with thy holy laws. I will adore thee in the society of thy elect, and with them I will ardently sigh after the Heavenly Jerusalem—the seat of bliss. The world, perhaps, may attribute my conduct to weakness, my singularity to vain-glory; but do thou, O Lord, give me strength to resist the torrent of vice, and suffer me not to be seduced by evil example. The days of captivity will have an end. Thou wilt remember Abraham and David, thy servants. Thou wilt deliver thy people from slavery, and lead them into Sion. Then shalt thou alone reign over Israel, and over the nations that refuse to know thee. Then shall the former things pass away, and thou alone shalt remain for ever. Then shall all nations know that "thou alone, O Lord, are worthy to be adored."

In order therefore to profit by this discourse, you must be resolved to live differently from the rest of men; you must bear constantly in mind that the greater number are lost; you must disregard all customs which are not consistent with the law of God: you must reflect that the saints in every age were men of singular lives. Then, after having been distinguished from sinners on earth, you will be gloriously separated from them for all eternity.

XVIII.—QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE FAST OF LENT.

"When you fast, be not like hypocrites, sad."—*Matt*, vi, 16.

GOSPEL FOR ASH-WEDNESDAY.

With this gospel the Church ushers in the solemn fast of Lent. With this gospel she encourages us to put on the weeds of penance, and to endeavour with united efforts to disarm the wrath of God, to avert his impending judgments, and to expiate our sins. She exhorts us to enter on this holy time without sadness; because fasting will enable us to triumph over the flesh and the devil: and ought sadness and grief to be indulged by the warrior who has the means of victory in his power? May our enemy alone repine at the approach of this happy season: may he be sad during these days of propitiation: may he be alarmed at the view of these consolatory appearances of repentance, and tremble at the display of the mercies which God has prepared for sinners. But you, my beloved, you ought to anoint your heads, and to open your hearts to the feelings of holy joy and gladness: conquerors are never sorrowful.

There are, indeed, various kinds of sadness. There is a holy sadness—the sadness of repentance, which advanceth the great work of salvation, and is enlivened by the interior consolations of the Holy Ghost. There is likewise the sadness which is alluded to in the words of my text—the sadness of hypocrisy, which observes the letter of the law, and puts on the appearance of rigid austerity, in order to gain the applause of men: this is very uncommon in these times. Lastly, there is a sadness produced by the depravity of corrupt nature, which revolts at the idea of self-denial and restraint: and this, I am grieved to say, is the sadness which is felt by the generality of Christians, and against which it is particularly necessary you should be guarded.

The consequences of this sadness are obvious and certain: every frivolous pretext is adduced for the purpose of obtaining an exemption from the rigour of the law. In order, therefore, that you may not be led into error on a subject of this importance, I will display the futility of the pretexts which are usually alleged, and lay down in plain terms the conditions on which alone a dispensation can be lawfully founded.

1. Were I speaking to men who despised the laws of the Church on this head, and disputed her authority in enacting them, I would prove that fasting always was, and always will be necessary for the support of a truly Christian life. I would go back to the pure ages of Christianity, and show you that religion itself was nourished in the bosom of abstinence and fasting: I would say that, after the ascension of our Lord, the disciples assembled in Jerusalem, and devoted their whole time to prayer and fasting: I would say, that the primitive Christians served the laborious apprenticeship to martyrdom in the austerities of fasting; and that, in the midst of the licentiousness of an idolatrous camp, the Christian soldiers assembled together in order to celebrate, with greater solemnity, the fast prescribed by universal custom: I would say, that the emissaries of the persecutors designated the faithful by the paleness of their countenances, and the odour of sanctity and mortification which distinguished them from the rest of mankind: I would say, that our mortal enemy, who is ever ready to extract pernicious effects from the most pious observances, stirred up many restless spirits to practise new and extravagant abstinences, not with a view to the reparation of the injured justice of God, but with an idea that the meats themselves were unclean: so strongly was the whole Christian world convinced that, after the death of the Spouse, the obligation of fasting was indispensable.

I proceed, however, on the supposition that I am speaking to men who are neither rebellious nor obedient; who acknowledge the obligation of fasting, but who will not fast; who do not openly exclaim with the impious, *I will not obey*, but who, with the men invited to the marriage feast (*Luke*, xiv, 19), find some plea or other to excuse their disobedience.

In order to distinguish truth from falsehood in a subject of this importance, it is necessary to state, that since the law of fasting is made and received, it is impossibility alone that can justify the infringement of it: by *impossibility* I mean *a difficulty founded on evident and considerable danger:* for the Church established the law with the intent not to destroy in this world, but to save in the next.

This being the truth, let us now examine your excuses. You say, in the first place, with great assurance and boldness, that you are dispensed with fasting for sufficient reasons; that your conscience does not reproach you on that head; and that, if you had nothing but the transgression of this precept to answer for before God, you could present yourself at his tribunal without fear: or, in other words, that

you have naturally a weak constitution, that you are not able to undergo the severities of fasting, and that the little health you enjoy is entirely owing to care and precaution.

If it be true that your weakness is such as you describe it to be, I will ask whence did it originate? Was it not from this over solicitude and care to preserve it? Was it not brought on by that soft voluptuous life which you have led? Was it not occasioned by habits of indolence, and by constantly indulging your sensual appetite in all its caprices? Were you, however, to examine impartially into the state of your health, you perhaps would discover that the constant aversion you feel for self-denial and penance, has led you into an error on this subject; and that you imagine that your constitution is weak, because you never have had piety and resolution sufficient to induce you to try its strength. If this be the case, as it probably is, can you pretend that the very reason which makes penance more necessary, is a sufficient plea for a dispensation? Your imaginary weakness is itself a crime, and ought to be expiated by extraordinary austerities, instead of exempting you from those which are common to all the faithful.

If the Church were to make any distinction among her children; if she was inclined to grant privileges to some, and none to others, it would be to those whose lowly and dependent station exposes them to the hardships and fatigues of toilsome labour—who suffer from the severities of the seasons, from hunger, from thirst, from public oppressions, and from private wrongs—who have only a distant view of the pleasures which this world affords—and whose happiness has attained its greatest height—when a bare sufficiency is procured for themselves and families. But as for those on whom the world has lavished its choicest gifts—whose greatest unhappiness arises from the satiety and disgust which is inseparable from sensual felicity, they can pretend to no other distinction than that of increased austerity, and a prolongation of the canonical rigours of penance.

But what is their conduct? The opulent, the independent, the higher classes of society—the men who alone seem to need repentance—the men for whom this penitential time is principally intended, are almost the only ones who plead for a dispensation; whilst the poor artizan, the indigent labourer, who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow—whose days of feasting and merriment would be to the rich man days of penance and mortification, whilst he, I say, bows down with respect and submission to this holy law, and even in his poverty retrenches from his usual pittance, and makes the

time of Lent a time of extraordinary suffering and penance. But, my God! the time will come when thou wilt openly espouse the cause of thy holy law, and confound the advocates of human concupiscence. The Pharisees in the gospel disfigured their faces, in order that their fasting might be remarked by men: but this is not the hypocrisy of the present day; no: after a year spent in excess, in murmurings, and in sin, the pampered disciples of a crucified Jesus put on a pale, a weak appearance at the commencement of this holy time, for the sole purpose of setting up a plausible pretext to violate in peace the law of fasting and abstinence.

My dear brethren, has the tenderness of your constitution ever deterred you from taking part in any worldly enjoyment? Ah! you can bear the fatigues of company and entertainments; you can overcharge yourselves with surfeiting and wine; you can submit to the painful consequences of high living and intemperance; you can keep irregular hours, and take other liberties which would be felt by the strongest constitution. It is fasting alone that you cannot endure; then only are you particularly solicitous for your health, when penance is required.

Is it for me only, says the Lord by his prophet, is it for me only that you refuse to suffer, O house of Israel? You are indefatigable and strong in the ways of iniquity, but in my service you are weak and discouraged by the least difficulty. "Tell me if you have anything to justify yourselves."—*Isa.*, xliii, 26.

So it is, my beloved friends, and so it always has been: pleasures are never incommodious. The purchase of what you love is always cheap. The slavery of the world, of riches, and of iniquity is not painful, because you are worldly, ambitious, and sensual. But, if you could once divest yourselves of this spirit of the world and imbibe the spirit of Christ, then your strength would not fail in his service; then you would be convinced that the law of fasting was not a cruel and destructive law; then you would acknowledge that the observance of your duties was not incompatible with the care of your health; then, with Daniel and the three children, you would experience that forbidden meats were not by any means necessary for the preservation of your strength and vigour.

Supposing, however, that fasting does weaken your corporal faculties, is it not just that you should stamp the painful seal of the cross on the body, which has been so often marked with the shameful characters of the beast? Is it not time that members which have served iniquity should at

length be subservient to justice; and that grace should be strengthened in your infirmity?

The law of fasting was instituted for the express purpose of weakening the body, and if you experience sensations of langour and faintness, it is no more than was intended; you have reason to rejoice on that account, for your merit will be proportionate to your patient suffering. The end, therefore, proposed by the law can never be a proper reason for a dispensation.

You perhaps may say, that the Church has approved your reasons, and released you from the obligation of fasting by the ministry of your director.

To this your own conscience will reply, that a dispensation obtained contrary to the intention and spirit of the Church, is void, and that the obligation is still in force: that is to say, that the dispensation which is granted without a sufficient cause, is not a dispensation in the sight of God. This is the doctrine of the saints. If, therefore, your reasons are not candidly and truly of that nature as to require a relaxation in your favour, you impose upon your pastors, and you are transgressors every time that you avail yourselves of this fraudulent and unjust dispensation.

The Church, indeed, is not ignorant of the imposition. She sees with grief, that almost the whole of the submission of these loose and supine Christians consists in extorting her consent to the infringement of her own laws. And if, notwithstanding this conviction, she still appear to favour their unjust demands, she is influenced by the fear of driving them to extremities, and is willing to keep them in her communion by the simple ties of outward respect and obedience. But woe to the Christians who force her to this afflicting alternative. The disease must be dangerous indeed, when the patient is allowed to choose his own regimen.

2. But allowing that your reasons are just, and that a dispensation is necessary, nevertheless, it not unfrequently happens, that you transgress the law of penance by the manner in which you avail yourselves of this dispensation of the Church.

It is incumbent on you, as Christians, to lament your inability to observe the law, and to offer up to God the sacrifice of an humble heart, as a kind of compensation for the corporal penance which you are unable to endure. Esther called on God to witness her necessity, and expressed her detestation when she was obliged to partake of the profane meats and banquets of the uncircumcised. Urias exclaimed, when he was pressed by his sovereign to go down to his own

house and enjoy the pleasures of a momentary repose: "What! shall I eat and drink while Israel and Juda are enduring the severities of the camp?"—2 *Kings*, xi, 11.

Are these, my beloved, your sentiments? Do you exclaim: Why am I constrained to spare this criminal flesh, while the Church is clothed in sackcloth and ashes—while my fellow members in Christ are walking courageously on in the holy paths of penance? Why, O Lord, have I not sufficient strength to satisfy thy justice—I, who have sufficient strength to offend thee? Why was I not endued with a bodily frame capable of enduring every degree of fatigue and torture, that the instrument of my crimes might be made the instrument of my punishment?

Ah! if you were animated with the true spirit of piety, you would blush at a distinction so little merited by your past life; you would consider such a singularity as a kind of anathema—as a leprosy which caused you to be banished from the society and communion of the body of the faithful; and you would endeavour to compensate for your bodily infirmities by the strength and vigour of your interior piety.

In the second place, you must reflect that the dispensation from fasting does not include a dispensation from doing penance. The Church has no intention of taking the cross from your shoulders; she is not authorised to do it: she can do no more than lessen its weight, and proportion it to the strength of the bearer. Lent must be in some manner or other a time of penance. St. Paul says, that he who does not distinguish the Eucharistic bread from common food is guilty of the body of the Lord: and I say to you, that whatever your infirmities may be, if you do not make a distinction between the time of Lent and other times, you are guilty of the law of fasting.

Now, what distinction do you make? Do you pray more than at other times? Are you more charitable to the poor? Do you soothe the afflictions of the suffering members of Christ, and make amends in their persons for the extraordinary gratifications which your infirmities require? Do you abstain from lawful pleasures which are not necessary for your health? Ah! my brethren, a compensation must be made. He who cannot offer a lamb in sacrifice, must offer a pair of doves. The justice of God must be satisfied. If you cannot crucify your flesh by fasting, you must chastise it by abstaining from unnecessary pleasures; you must mortify your turbulent passions by retirement; you must have less communication with the world; you must be more attentive to your domestic concerns; you must be more assidous in frequenting the place of worship, in receiving the

sacraments, and in performing works of mercy: you must be more circumspect in your whole conduct. This, says St. Chrysostom, is the fast which the Church requires from the infirm. To comply with this, neither health nor strength is requisite; a firm faith and the fear of God will alone enable you to perform it. But alas! a firm faith and the fear of God are precisely the virtues to which you are strangers. You object to sufferings of every description; you imagine that you are freed from all restraint as soon as you are dispensed; and because you are not able to comply with the whole precept, you joyfully conclude that you are not obliged to do anything.

There are many, I know, who say, that fasting is a matter of no great importance; that the great point is to be good and moral men; and that, as to food—whether it be this or that—whether they take three meals or one, it can be of no such consequence in the sight of God as to justify the declamations of the Church, or be a sufficient reason to subject the faithful to so many inconveniences and vexations.

Thus, the children of the world are not satisfied with merely violating the law of fasting and abstinence—they proceed even to abuse; they vilify it by giving it the name of prejudice which custom has established; and they put on the appearance of reason in order to infringe it without scruple. But what do they degrade? They degrade the most venerable tradition of the Church, the most ancient and the most universal point of discipline which has descended to us from our forefathers. The respectable institution of fasting, established by the apostles, consecrated by the custom of ages, honoured by the examples of patriarchs and prophets, and of Jesus Christ himself, is nothing more in their language than a popular devotion—a pious prejudice, of which enthusiasm alone can exact a rigorous and minute observance.

These, however, I trust are not the sentiments of any individual of this assembly. If, therefore, I will say in conclusion, if your infirmities require a dispensation, indulge not beyond the calls of necessity. Let your repasts savour of the frugality of this time of penance; let them be stamped in some part or other with the seal of mortification. Remember, that, although the Church consents that you do not accompany Moses on the mountain to fast the forty days, she expects that while you remain in the plains below, you neither partake of the profane enjoyments, the excesses, and the festive sports of the Israelites, nor unite with them in the adoration of the golden calf.

Let us, my beloved brethren, enter into the true spirit of

this holy time. Ah! can you remain unmoved at the affecting spectacle which will shortly be displayed before you? When you behold the Church in affliction and clothed in the weeds of mourning and sorrow—when you behold her ministers prostrate and weeping between the porch and the altar—when you behold your brethren armed with the weapons of penance, and fighting with determined resolution against flesh and blood, will you be able to refrain from uniting with them? Will you have resolution sufficient to continue immersed in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures? If the body cannot take part in the penitential works of the faithful, at least change your hearts, and be converted to the Lord. If you cannot rend, by fasting, the garment of flesh which encompasseth you, rend your hearts, says the Spirit of God, by the tears of grief and compunction. Surpass your brethren in the dispositions of your minds, if you cannot follow them in the exercises of the body. In a word, live more holily than they, and you will fast more profitably. Thus, you will glorify God in your infirmities, and in the end receive the reward which is promised to the truly penitent.

XIX.—FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE ABUSES OF FASTING.

"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry."
—*Matt.*, iv, 2.

What an example, dear Christians, is displayed before our eyes in the gospel of this Sunday. Innocence itself—the Lamb without spot—the Holy One of Israel, fasts in the midst of a dreary solitude. He fasts, not during a small portion of the day, nor from one only kind of food, like his pretended disciples of these times; but he fasts during the protracted space of forty days and forty nights; he abstains from every species of corporal nourishment. Prayer and contemplation are his only food: tears and supplications for lost man are his only employment. The anguish and horror excited by the view of the innumerable sins, and of the obstinate impenitence of mankind, render him insensible to the cravings of hunger and thirst: and the ardent longings of his soul to effect our deliverance from them cause him to submit with alacrity and joy to every pain, to every labour and fatigue.

Can we, my beloved, view this example of the Son of God

with indifference at this holy time? Can we, the authors of his sufferings, the victims who alone ought to be devoted to sacrifice, can we, I say, refuse to mingle our tears with his? Can we steel our hearts against the sorrows of repentance? He suffered voluntarily, and he suffered for our good alone: we are commanded to suffer, and to suffer for our own salvation. What more powerful incitement could be proposed to us than the sight of a God-Man fainting under the languors of fasting? But, alas! I fear that the greater number of Christians, instead of being inspired with a holy ardour, are solicitous only to avoid the rigours of the law, and to add to the mitigations which the relaxed morals of our forefathers have introduced.

My object in thus introducing the subject of fasting to your notice a second time, is to lay before you the extent of your obligations at this season, both as Christians and as sinners.

1. There is hardly any precept more universally abused than is the precept of fasting. At a time when the judgments of God are heavy upon the nations of the earth, and fasting and prayer are the only means of restraining his just indignation, Christians are solicitous only for an increase of the relaxations of the Church, and for a total abolition of everything that is painful to flesh and blood. They say that, in the first ages, when innocence and simplicity prevailed, severity of discipline was seasonable; but that, in these times, when immorality has spread its baneful influence on every side, a greater latitude, or even free liberty in the article of penance, is the only proper system to be adopted.

Instead of entering into a refutation of this irreligious principle—a principle which I trust is not entertained by any one in this assembly—I will examine what bounds the Church has thought proper to prescribe to her condescension, and I will endeavour to distinguish those relaxations which a vitiated custom has introduced from the mitigations which she either authorizes or tolerates. These may be collected from the motives which first gave rise to the institution of the law.

The law of fasting was instituted for the express purpose of crucifying the flesh, in order, says St. Chrysostom, to fortify the soul against future temptations, and to contribute to the expiation of past sins. Our fasting, therefore, must be sufficiently rigorous to answer this desirable end; otherwise, our fasting will be fruitless.

The flesh is crucified, and the passions are weakened, either by the length of abstinence, by the simplicity of food,

or by frugality in meals. Excuse the detail into which I must enter; it is indispensable; and I will be as concise as possible.

The length of abstinence is the first. The primitive Christians never broke their fast before sunset: and for this their slender meal they prepared themselves by an uninterrupted application to works of piety. They frequently watched in the temple, singing hymns and canticles over the tombs of the martyrs during the whole preceding night. This was their fast: and by the length and severity of their sufferings, they succeeded in weakening their flesh, and in opposing an effectual barrier to their criminal passions. But, my beloved brethren, what benefit do we reap from the severity of our fasts? What are our fasts? In addition to the indulgence of the Church, which has advanced the hour of repast, and has, moreover, tolerated a small refection in the morning and at night, we take the most unwarrantable licences. Our whole attention is apparently absorbed in devising means to arrive at the time of meal without pain or languor. We avoid the craving of hunger with the greatest care, not considering that the fast even of our Saviour was not exempt from it. And if, notwithstanding our care, we feel a slight faintness and debility, we gladly take alarm for the safety of our health, and plead for a dispensation.

But, my beloved, do you not know that at this time you ought, with the royal prophet, to prevent the rising sun, in order to prolong your fast, and to unite your prayers with those of the Church; that you ought scrupulously to offer to the Lord the first fruits of a day which is to be sanctified by penance, and that you ought to put to profit every moment of this time of grace and salvation?

Not sufficiently gratified with these liberties and relaxations, you frequently make it a subject of inquiry whether the fast is injured or broken by drinking out of meal-time? I reply in the first place, that it being the intent of the law of fasting to mortify the sensual appetites, and particularly the taste, every liberty between meals which is favourable to this sense is a kind of infringement of the law. I reply in the second place, that every mitigation of the pains of abstinence is contrary to the spirit of the law. But, supposing that the unlawfulness of it were only doubtful, would you be prudent in exposing yourselves to the danger? This, at least, is incontestable, that these mitigations are of new date; and that example can neither justify an abuse, nor constitute anything like a prescriptive right in opposition to a positive injunction.

Allowing, however, for sake of argument, that these relaxations are innocent, nevertheless out of respect for this holy time you ought to abstain from them. You have many unlawful gratifications to atone for; and when will you atone for them, if, even in Lent, you will not refrain, in the spirit of piety and penance, from things which you deem to be lawful at other times? Do not, my beloved friends, suffer yourselves to be so very easily imposed upon: our fasts are already so much relaxed by the tolerance of the Church, that we cannot pass the bounds which she has prescribed, even in the most trifling degree, without incurring the guilt of venial sin. Her indulgence has been extended to the utmost limits, and beyond them we cannot take one step without transgressing.

2. In the second place, what shall we say of the simplicity of food, and of the frugality in meals which ought to be observed at this holy time? In Lent, says St. Leo, we should live sparingly; we should feed the poor members of Christ with what we retrench from our tables; and our frugality, as the apostle insinuates, should impart abundance to our suffering brethren. But is this our rule of conduct? The fact is, and it neither can nor ought to be dissembled, that we seek to gratify the sensual appetite as much in Lent as at other times. We procure every delicacy that our means will permit: and if we be so situated that we cannot procure so great a variety as we wish, we either violate the fast by taking meat, or we forfeit the merit of it by our impatience and complaints.

I say nothing of our temperance in the one meal allowed: for we seldom prescribe any other limits to our appetite than what are suggested by sensual avidity. In what part of our fast, then, is any merit to be found? In the morning the generality, so far from adhering strictly to what is tacitly allowed in this kingdom, and which is very little, abstain only from butter, and take their fill nearly as usual. At the great regular meal of the day, every thing is given up to the gratification of the appetite. And it is known that their collations, as they are called, do in point of quantity at least differ but little from their common evening refreshments: sensuality indeed they cannot indulge, because there is no tempting variety of food, but they eat unsparingly of what there is. Thus, abstaining from what are called *white meats* at night and morning, and from *flesh meat* once or twice in the week oftener than usual, is the only penance that we perform in Lent; or in other words, the relaxations which our forefathers would have considered as a grievous infringe-

ment of the precept, we consider as the highest point of observance.

You are well aware, my brethren, that the Church existed a thousand years before any indulgence was granted to the faithful. One repast, taken in the evening with thanksgiving, terminated the abstinence of the whole day. And then, what a sorry repast! It consisted of herbs and vegetables; a repast of mourning and penance, where every thing breathed the mortification of Jesus. Pious conversations, spiritual reading, and exhortations to martyrdom, were the only seasoning; and they ate rather to prolong their sufferings and to satisfy nature, than to flatter sensuality.

The diminution of charity in the breasts of the greater number of her children, obliged the Church in after ages to relax from the rigour of her discipline in this point; she, however, acted as creditors are accustomed to act with their bankrupt and insolvent debtors—she made a composition with their tepidity—she saved what she could of the wreck, and acquitted them of the rest with regret.

Every indulgence, therefore, which the Church allows in addition to the one meal, is a favour which she has granted through necessity. Our precautions not to exceed cannot be too rigorous. But where are the men who are solicitous to keep within the narrow limits? Alas! few of this description are to be found: there are none, I fear, except a small number of retired souls, penitent solitaries, chaste and tender virgins, habituated to the yoke of the Lord from their infancy. From appearances, one would judge that severe discipline was intended for them alone, and that criminal, worldly-minded men, after a life of wickedness and excess, were authorized to mitigate and retrench every remnant of penitential austerity.

Such, my brethren, is our fast of Lent. Without the smallest intention to exaggerate, such it is as I have described it: such and no better. This, then, in its fullest extent, is the entire course of what has always been considered as the first and greatest of all our penitential labours. And these are the offerings which we make to God: these the remains of that venerable institution, which has been handed down to us from the earliest times of our apostolic ancestors: these the fasts, formerly so famous amongst Christians, and consecrated by the memorable examples of Moses, of Elias, and of Christ himself.

3. I will not, however, dwell on this discouraging subject any longer, but continue the series of instructions which I had formed for your benefit at the commencement of this

penitential season. Let me exhort you, therefore, in the first place, to bear in mind that your works of self-denial and mortification, at this time, must be devoted to the expiation of the pleasures and crimes of the past year. According to the gospel, indeed, the whole life of a Christian should be devoted to mortification. But in these days of degeneracy, the Church despairs of inculcating with success the necessity of an uninterrupted course of penance; and, therefore, she insists particularly on the due observance of this time, lest the spirit of penance should be totally extinguished in the breasts of her children. Fulfil, then, with alacrity this easy course of penance which she imposes on you: and may the trivial sufferings you will endure supply for every other deficiency. Submit with joy to so lenient a law. Do not murmur under so slight a yoke; and do not exaggerate the inconveniences you may experience, nor complain of the rigours of this relaxed remnant of primitive discipline.

Remember, likewise, that as the object of the fast is to satisfy the justice of God for your former infidelities, you must be particularly on your guard against the commission of fresh crimes. If you are not, you destroy with one hand what you raise with the other; you offend your Judge, at the time that you are endeavouring to appease him. What will it profit you to abstain from meats, which are good in themselves, which God hath created, and which may be lawfully eaten at other times, if you abstain not from sin, which at all times and in all seasons is strictly forbidden by the law of God? What will your fasting and abstinence avail you, if they are not accompanied with purity of conscience, which alone can insure you a reward from the great Searcher of hearts? Oh! be not deceived: suffer what you will, unless you refrain from sin, God will pay no regard to your sufferings: fast as rigorously as you please, God, says the prophet, will reject your fasts. For can you suppose even for a moment, that fasting consists wholly and entirely in abstaining from forbidden food? This was the fast of the Jews, who followed only the letter of the law, which killeth. The fast of the Christians is sanctified by renouncing the ways of sin, and is consummated by subduing the passions. If, therefore, you are not more chaste, more humble, more charitable, more patient, you fast not, or at least you fast in vain. The law of abstinence was instituted to promote a reformation of your lives: and if you reform not, you do not fulfil the law, or, at least, you fulfil it without profit.

Remember, in the third place, that, as it is your duty, at this time, to satisfy the justice of God, you are not only to

avoid sin, but you are required to refrain from amusements, which may, perhaps, be innocent, and lawfully indulged at other times. You are now public penitents, striving to disarm the anger of the Lord. Tears, silence, prayers, are the only occupations suited to your penitential course. Plays, parties of pleasure, indolence, and unnecessary pastimes are forbidden. If you partake of them, you renounce the character of true penitents; you abandon the enterprise, you interrupt your course. Yes: you violate the laws of Lent as often as you mingle the pleasures of the world with the holy afflictions of penance.

Lastly, remember, that it is the intention of the Church that you prepare yourselves during these days of penance for the grace of the resurrection, and for the participation of the Lamb of God, the true Christian passover. Begin, then, betimes, to eradicate your vicious habits. Begin, immediately, to abstain from sins to which you have hitherto been addicted, and which you will lament at the feet of God's ministers at the conclusion of this season. For why should you defer your preparation for the adorable sacrament till the festival is at hand; and either expose yourselves to the danger of an unworthy communion, or compel the judges of your conscience to refuse you the bread of Heaven at the time when they are breaking it for the rest of your brethren? Begin, I say, betimes; try your strength; try beforehand whether your resolutions are sufficiently firm to insure your fidelity to the promises of amendment which you will then make to God. It is a dreadful thing to be exposed to the dangers of sacrilege and perjury. Fight resolutely, and prepare yourselves in such a manner that you may be able to adduce the past as an earnest for the faithful performance of your promises for the future. The time that intervenes is certainly not too long for your preparation, after the life that you have led. The space of forty days is not more than is necessary for purifying your souls from the defilement of sin, and putting things in order for the reception of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Hearken to the admonition of the apostle read on this day: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."—2 *Cor.*, vi, 2. Shake off immediately the odious yoke under which you have hitherto groaned, and enter seriously on the ways of penance. You have never experienced any real pleasure in the paths of sin. The days in which you seemed to enjoy them are gone. The charm that glittered before your eyes is vanished, and nothing remains but the agonies of remorse in this world, and the prospect of

eternal misery in the next. What are the advantages you have derived—where are the fruits you have reaped from your multiplied excesses? Ah! you forged new chains to aggravate your slavery; you prepared fresh ingredients to embitter your cup withal. Let the experience of the past undeceive you, and return at length to the Lord. Return to him for the love of virtue; but if that motive be insufficient to influence your determination, fix your eyes on the vanity and emptiness of all the pleasures of iniquity, and return to him on that account.

Great God! I acknowledge this day in your presence, that I have never enjoyed any real pleasure at a distance from thee: may thy holy name be for ever blessed. Reject not these feeble commencements of my repentance. I have run with sinners, and have trod in all their ways. But, my God, I here confess that all the pleasures of the world were insufficient to satisfy my desires; and therefore I renounce them for ever. To acknowledge that this were the motive of my return to thee, would overwhelm me with confusion, were I not convinced that it was thy grace, O merciful God, that embittered my palate, and rendered insipid all the delights which the world presented to me. How many souls are there who are never disgusted with vanity, never wearied with iniquity? How many souls are there, who are buried in a profound sleep even to the end; who open not their eyes until time is no more; until, struck with the agonies of death, and already judged, they are on the point of appearing before thy terrible tribunal?

Increase, O God, these first symptoms of disquietude, which thy grace has excited in my soul: increase them, I beseech thee, and cause me at length to feel that happy anxiety which leads to true repentance. Add to the disrelish of unlawful pleasure that true love of justice and virtue which will complete thy triumph over a corrupted heart, and from a vessel of wrath change it into a vessel of election and honour.

XX.—SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE MOTIVES FOR A CHANGE OF LIFE.

"This is the will of God, your sanctification."—I. *Thess.*, iv., 3.

God, whose mercies seem to be more abundant in proportion as our iniquities increase, commissions me again to declare

to you, that in the dispensation of his justice he has your sanctification alone in view.

In the old law, when his people had abandoned the ways of virtue, he sent his prophets to announce that his avenging arm was extended; and by the terror of his threats, he stemmed the course of their crying enormities. Then Jerusalem clothed herself in sackcloth and ashes: her priests wept between the porch and the altar: her elders assembled in the temple, and with their enfeebled voices invoked the God of Israel: the bride neglected the ornaments of her state: the desolate virgins made the air resound with their sighs and lamentations: and the Lord, moved by their tears and repentance, restrained his arm, and looked down with pity and compassion on that unfaithful city.

Our ministry, in these days of salvation, is the same. As all flesh hath corrupted its ways, he sends us, as he formerly sent the prophets, not to announce future calamities, but to excite you to repentance by the view of the chastisements which he has already inflicted on the Christian world. He endeavours to draw you to himself not by threats, but by the evils which he has scattered with profusion around you. We are not, however, sent by an implacable Judge, but by a God, who pities your blindness, who wills your sanctification, and who opens to you the bosom of his eternal mercies.

Attend, therefore, beloved Christians, to the voice of the Lord. Behold, now is the acceptable time; harden not your hearts. Be converted to me, saith the Lord, in fasting, and weeping, and supplications; rend your hearts, and not your garments; and be converted to the Lord your God, because he is compassionate and rich in mercies, and because he is ready, on your repentance, to suspend the calamities which his justice has begun to inflict upon you.

This is the day of salvation. The gates of Heaven are thrown open; the blood of Jesus pleads powerfully in your behalf; the cross is displayed before you. Resist not, my beloved friends, these graces of your God; he invites you to return to him by every motive; he strikes terror into your souls when you look back on your past sins; he encourages you by the example of Jesus and all his elect throughout the world; he assists you by the prayers of the whole Church; and he terrifies you by the public calamities which his justice has begun to inflict on the earth.

These are the motives which I am commissioned to lay before you, in order to hasten your return to God by a sincere and perfect conversion.

1. Were you to call to mind the history of your past life,

you would there discover sufficient inducements to determine you to put your house in order without delay against the great day of the Lord. Consider for a moment what your life has hitherto been. Beginning from the moment that you received your existence from God, what use have you made of your reason, of the powers of your body, and of the faculties of your soul? How did you employ your youthful years? What profit have you reaped from your talents and acquirements? How have you spent the time which ought to have been employed for Heaven? How have you endured afflictions, losses, and sickness? What use have you made of the mysteries of religion, of its solemnities and sacraments, of the instructions, and of all the other aids with which Christianity has supplied you—aids which inspired the saints with an increased ardour in their spiritual warfare, and by means of which they were enabled to complete the edifice of a truly Christian life? Take, then, I say, a retrospective view, and you will behold with astonishment, that your whole life has been a continued tissue of excesses, of crimes, of tepidity and sloth. If at any time the thread has been broken—or, in other words, if from time to time you have listened to the inspirations of Heaven,—and you have felt the glow of divine love in your breasts, you have steeled your hearts against it; you have quickly returned to your former ways, and have added to your other crimes the guilt of turning your backs on the gracious invitations of your blessed Redeemer.

How indispensably necessary for your eternal welfare, my beloved, is a change of life! And have you as yet fixed the time for your conversion? Reflect that your days flow rapidly on; years roll away in quick succession; youth is vanishing, and life itself is on the wing. Your friends, your relations, your companions are daily dropping into the grave. You yourselves, perhaps, are only a few paces distant from the same term. The days which have already flown over your head are like a dream—a vapour, which has disappeared, and left no trace behind. The days you have yet to live will disappear in the same manner, and leave your hands as empty as the former have done. Why not, then, take advantage of the present moment? You have numberless crimes to expiate: why not accept the mercies of the Lord, now that they are offered to you? Time is now at your disposal. Delay not; for, ere long, time will be no more. Your experience of the vanity of the world, and of all its fleeting pleasures, has long since convinced you that happiness was not to be found in its embraces. You have discovered that sin, although decked in the most alluring charms, is invariably

accompanied by anxiety, remorse, and misery. On what pretext, therefore, do you defer the reformation of your lives? Have they not been sufficiently criminal to induce the necessity of an immediate change? Do you expect that your chains will break asunder of themselves? Do you wait for an opportunity of doing penance without labour or expense? Do you intend to delay this great work till you are stretched on the bed of death, on the supposition that the sentiments of fear, which will then agitate your souls, will expiate the sins of your whole lives? Or have you renounced the hopes of salvation, like the impious who know not God?

Ah! beloved Christians, if you had only once been so unfortunate as to fall into mortal sin, a whole life would not have been too much to have devoted to tears and repentance. Defiled as you are with numberless transgressions, can you refuse to consecrate to God the small portion that remains? To-morrow your soul will be demanded of you; and will you dispute with God the small space that intervenes? Too happy ought you to esteem yourselves, that the Lord in his mercy will condescend to accept this small remnant; that he deigns to stretch out his fatherly hand to you after so long, so dismal a shipwreck; and that he is ready to embrace and receive you into favour, although so disfigured and defiled by sin?

2. Recollect, however, that by deferring your conversion at this time, you renounce all the merit arising from the due observance of Lent. You fast; but what will your fast avail you, if you forsake not your evil ways? What fruit will you gather from your abstinence, from your instructions, and from the penitential exercises of this time, if you break not your chains asunder, if you arise not from the deep abyss into which you have fallen? The Lord requires in the first instance a change of heart; and if you refuse him this, neither prayer, nor fasting, nor alms will be entitled to any merit in his sight.

Should there, however, be any in this assembly who refuse to turn to the Lord at this holy time, I would not be understood to advise them to neglect the law of fasting, under the pretence that the observance of the letter is of no avail to the obstinate sinner: for this would be to advise them to take part with the impious at once. No: dearly beloved, far be it from me. My advice is, that since God continues to invite you to holiness and justice—since he still stretches out his hand to raise you like Lazarus from the grave, and perhaps has decreed that this present Lent should witness the reformation of your lives, and a happy termination of all your miseries and crimes, my advice, I say, is that you enter the lists

courageously with the just, and that it be your earnest desire to fight, not as beating the air—to run, not as running in vain. By this means, your observance of the letter will be a step, at least, towards a change of life—a preparation for the grace of God; by this means you will unite yourselves exteriorly with the just; you will testify your fear of disobeying God; you will express your respect for his laws; you will pay homage to religion; in a word, you will have some reason to hope that ere long you will enter the gates of mercy. But we pass on to the motives arising from the cross of Jesus, and the examples of the saints.

3. The cross is the only inheritance left by Christ to his Church. Our union with him in Heaven depends on our suffering with him on earth. (2 *Tim.*, ii, 22). This is the spirit of our vocation, and the foundation of our hope. This alone distinguishes us from the idolatrous nations who know not Christ. Take away from the morality of the gospel the maxims of the cross—self-denials, humility, the renouncing of our own will, and a thorough contempt of the world and of all its fleeting pleasures, and we might have learned the rest from the philosophers, whose doctrines abounded with moral precepts, and inculcated the necessity of a strict guard against vice and excess.

The cross, therefore, of Jesus, properly constitutes the grand characteristic of a Christian, and is the great road to salvation, which he has marked out to his disciples. I say the cross of *Jesus*—for the world has its crosses—our passions have their crosses—and we possess the art of forming to ourselves crosses of various kinds that are purely imaginary. These, however are the crosses of concupiscence. They are the punishments due to our passions, and not the remedies of our crimes. They are the sad consequences of vice, and not the rewards of virtue. And yet, we submit to them all; but, from the cross of Jesus we turn away with precipitation and disgust. We refuse to suffer anything for his sake: we neither resist our passions, our humours, our caprices, nor make the sacrifice of our disorderly inclinations or unlawful pleasures. We carry the cross of our passions, the cross of our discontents, the cross of our hatred and envy—that is to say, the cross of the world and of the devil, and we attempt not to ease ourselves of the load. Alas; the cross of Christ is pleasant and much lighter, and we throw it from us; the cross of Christ imparts happiness to those who carry it, and sweetens the crosses of the world, and we will not give it preference; the cross of Christ is the price of eternity, and we think it beneath our notice.

What infatuation is this? How long shall we be the dupes of our own illusions, and shut our eyes to the light of Heaven? Why will we not be convinced that the Lord sweetens the yoke we carry for his sake? We have experience that the yoke of the world is a yoke of iron, which overpowers and destroys: we believe that the wages of sin is death; and why will we not believe that the grace of God is everlasting life?

4. Ah! be no longer deceived; open your eyes to the light which the Sun of Justice throws around you. Now is the time to arise from sleep. The graces which flow from the cross during this season offer you resources which you may not perhaps enjoy another time. The example of the whole Church invites you, and the prayers of all the elect are offered up in your behalf. The saints crucify their flesh by fasting and retirement; and their voice, like the voice of innocent blood, ascends to the throne of God, not to solicit his judgments, but to draw down his mercies. Be not, then, discouraged by the idea of difficulties, but have confidence and good will. If the corporal mortifications of Judith alone in Israel reconciled the Lord with his people, and averted the effects of his just indignation, what may you not expect from so many faithful souls, who in every quarter of the globe offer up their prayers and austerities to Heaven for the pardon of your sins? What may you not expect from so many holy pastors who contribute their supplications and labour to gain you to Christ—from so many pious solitaries—from so many chaste virgins, who in the recesses of their retreat mourn like the dove, and endeavour to disarm the anger of the Lord, and change the thunders of his vengeance into the mild dews of benediction and grace?

Every assistance, my dear friends, is offered you. And will you still refuse to enter into the bosom of the clemency of your God? Will you oppose the efforts with which the whole Church endeavours to recal you to a more Christian and holy life? Are you obstinately bent on perishing, at the time that the whole congregation of the just are stretching out their hands to save you from shipwreck? What more can the Lord do for you? He tortures you with remorse of conscience, and you resist the motions of his grace. He offers you the abundant resources of religion, and you refuse their aid. He unites in your favour the prayers of all his elect, and you render them useless by your obstinate impenitence. He proclaims, by the mouth of his ministers, the promises and the threats of his law, and they are effaced from your minds the moment they are pronounced. What more

can he do for you? The only remaining access to your heart is punishment. He must chastise you. He must execute the threats of his indignation. This is his last resource. He has spoken in vain; now he must strike, in order to compel you to listen to his voice.

5. Having, therefore, filled up the measure of our iniquities, he has at length poured out the bitter chalice of his wrath on our guilty heads. He has abandoned his inheritance; he has delivered up the kingdoms of Christianity to the rage of our mortal enemy, the prince of darkness. He has permitted the dissemination of the most pernicious principles, of doctrines the most destructive of society, of harmony, of peace, and of all our beloved worldly enjoyments. He has permitted the flames of war to ravage nations and destroy kingdoms. He has not spared even the seat of Christianity itself. He has empowered misery, wretchedness, and want, to fix their empire on the ruins of prosperity, happiness, and abundance, and to heap their horrid gifts with profusion on their devoted subjects.

Yes, beloved friends, his wrath has burst over our heads. The enormity of our crimes has ascended to the tribunal of his justice. He has looked down from his high sanctuary, says the prophet (*Ps.*, ci, 20), and he has beheld the faithful without morals, the nobility without religion, the ministers of the altar without piety, and the fairest of our creation without chastity and without modesty.

He has looked down from his high sanctuary, and he has beheld adulteries, fornications, blasphemy, and impiety, honoured and applauded in the midst of his people; rapines and injustice covered with the specious title of lawful gain and traffic; the most extravagant excesses authorized by the example of the great; and profusion and luxury everywhere increasing with public calamities.

He has looked down from his high sanctuary, and he has beheld the corruption of the whole human race. He has seen them bend their servile knee to mammon, and offer up their sighs and tears, their prayers and supplications, at the unhallowed shrine of the golden calf. He has seen the false deity, the molten god, the object of universal adoration. He has seen religion despised, and treated as the lowest weakness; and the few that still continue to pay their adoration to him, he has seen coming to him with divided hearts, and confining their worship to mere exterior homage, to a few prayers pronounced with their lips, whilst their minds are given up to tepidity, to sensuality, to hatred, animosity, and discontent. In a word, he has seen himself dethroned from

the hearts of his people, and faith almost banished from the earth.

He has therefore discharged the cup of his indignation and wrath on the earth; he has let loose the implacable spirits—war, pestilence, and famine, to ravage the whole Christian world.

And what use have we made of these public chastisements? What measures have we taken to disarm the anger of the Lord? We render ourselves more criminal by our complaints, impatience, and discontent; and we neither lament, nor do penance for our murders, our sorceries, our fornications and our thefts!

Good God! how shall I endure the scrutiny of thy justice! What hast thou not done for my salvation; and what have I not done to obstruct the effect of thy mercies? Thou hast exerted every means to preserve thy creature from destruction; thou hast invited him by thy graces and inspirations; thou hast stimulated him by anguish of mind, by thwarting his passions, by disappointing his hopes; thou hast endeavoured to compel him by calamities both public and private: thou hast moreover formed his heart for goodness; thou hast instilled into it sentiments of virtue and uprightness—sentiments which made him shudder at impiety and excess, which incessantly chided him in secret for his shameful weaknesses, and importuned him to return to thee. My God! what reply shall I make, covered as I am with thy benefits, and with my own ingratitude? Lord, cease not to stretch out thy hand to my relief. Thou hast already done too much, to suffer thy creature to perish without aid. The more unworthy I am of new favours, the more will I hope in thee. The wretchedness of my state increases my confidence, and the excess of my miseries is the only title on which I claim thy eternal mercies.

XXI.—THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON INCONSTANCY IN THE WAYS OF VIRTUE.

"And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."—*Luke*, xi, 26.

This parable of the impure spirit is, according to St. Chrysostom, a mystical prophecy of our Saviour, denouncing the final reprobation of the Jews, and the evils which were in a short time to befal Jerusalem. He seems to describe the wretched state to which that ungrateful city was so frequently reduced by the sins of their fathers, and to display

the excess of his mercies in as frequently hastening to her relief. Hence, he leaves them to conclude, that Jerusalem will so often relapse into her infidelity, that God will at length entirely forsake her, and her last state will become worse than the first.

Let us apply this parable to ourselves. We, like the unfaithful Jerusalem, have been oftentimes delivered from the impure spirit; and as often have we again opened the door of our hearts to him: we have oftentimes bewailed our offences; and as often have we dried up our tears by a repetition of the same crimes: we have oftentimes been disgusted with the world and its follies, and then we returned to the Lord; the next day, disgusted with piety, we demanded back our hearts, and restored them to the world: our whole lives have been a continued succession of confessions and relapses. After so many ineffectual attempts, therefore, we have every reason to fear that God will at length entirely forsake us, and that our last state will become worse than the first. Perhaps you may ask me, in what consists the danger of this state? We are not extortioners; we are not unjust; we are not adulterers; we fast; we frequent the sacraments; we are not like the rest of men; why then should we fear that the Lord will abandon us? Is he rendered more inexorable by the *few* sins which we commit, than by the *multiplied enormities* of others? I answer, that the resources which have frequently wrought the conversion of the most abandoned sinners, are too weak to complete the reformation of the fickle and inconstant Christian, and that, of all characters, the character of inconstancy is the most remote from salvation. This truth I will endeavour to establish in this discourse.

1. Although the spirit of God breathes where he will, and can, by innumerable means, draw the rebellious heart of man to himself; although he can work a change in the minds of the most voluptuous, and turn their schemes of pleasure into plans of repentance; there is, nevertheless, a class of men who have frustrated all the merciful designs of Providence, and of whose salvation, consequently, little hopes can be entertained.

This class is composed of those unsteady and fickle Christians who are virtuous and worldly by turns; who relapse into their former crimes as often as they repent of them; who are, at one time, full of zeal for the honour and glory of God, and at another, full of ardour in the pursuit of vanity and pleasure.

Of the salvation of this numerous class of people, I say, little hope can be entertained. St. Paul says in express

terms, that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, have tasted also the Heavenly gifts, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away, to be again renewed to penance."—*Heb.*, vi, 4, 5, 6. Candour, indeed, obliges me to acknowledge, that by the word *impossible*, is meant, not an absolute impossibility in the sight of God, for the examples of David and St. Peter are proofs of the contrary, but only, that it is impossible to be renewed to penance by the ordinary means employed by Providence for reclaiming sinners. This position I will prove by a few conclusive arguments.

The first method employed by the Providence of God to withdraw the sinner from the evil of his ways, is to infuse into his soul a clear knowledge of the truth. The children of the world are immersed in the shades of darkness: they are ignorant of the great duties of religion; they know not that their maxims are false, their prejudices unfounded, their customs dangerous and sinful. The moment, therefore, that the light of truth bursts upon their sight, they are struck with amazement; they awake, as it were, from a profound sleep; they are astonished to find that they are ignorant of the only thing which it behoved them to know; they are startled at the sight of the precipice, on the brink of which they had been sleeping. These first agitations of the soul are seconded by the powerful attractions of grace, and a sudden and permanent conversion is frequently the effect.

This plentiful source of benedictions, however, is closed to the inconstant Christian; or rather, it has been frequently opened to him, and his inconstancy has always prevented its effect. He has oftentimes been enlightened, and as often has he replunged into darknesss: he has oftentimes seen the error of his ways, and the danger to which his salvation is exposed, and as often has he stilled the tumults of his breast by a few works of piety, and returned to his former habits. The first time, indeed, that the light of truth flashed on his soul, he felt the agitations which I have described; he was for a time fervent and repentant. But now, that he has so often turned his back on his God, the returns of light are like the glimmerings of an expired taper, the gleam is momentary and faint; it enlightens not his soul; he can barely discern the gross defilements of more heinous sins, and he vainly imagines that he removes them by a mechanical reception of the sacraments.

"Much better would it have been," says an apostle, "if he had never known the way of justice, than after having known

it, to turn back."—2 *Pet.*, ii, 21. The Jews, on their return from captivity, melted into tears, when the book of the law, of which they had been so long deprived, was publicly read by the prophet Esdras. They struck their breasts, they dismissed their unlawful wives, and they regulated their conduct according to its maxims: so powerful is the force of truth not abused. But the daily lecture of this same law occasioned, in process of time, not a reform of conduct, but a hardness of heart. In the same manner, the most enlightened sinners, nowadays, are generally the most incorrigible: they are familiar with every argument with which we enforce the necessity of repentance; they will speak with a flow of eloquence on the vanities of the world, and on the importance of salvation. But the knowledge of the truth seems to increase their tranquillity: they are veterans in the warfare against God; and, vainly supposing that it will be, at any time, as easy to love the truth as it is to know the truth, they remain deliberately obstinate in the ways of sin, till at length they are surprised by the unexpected summons of the Almighty to render an account of their stewardship. Depend upon it, my friends, there is every reason to be alarmed for the salvation of these enlightened sinners, who know every thing and who practise nothing. Yes: "it is impossible for those who have been enlightened, and who are fallen away, to be again renewed to penance."

2. In the second place, sinners are frequently reclaimed by *the taste of the Heavenly gift of virtue*, which always accompanies the beginnings of wisdom, and by the joy which arises in the soul when she is first disengaged from the enormous load of guilt, and in possession of the sweets of peace and innocence. Ah! dear Christians, nothing can exceed the pious transports of the soul, which after having been buried in the loathsome sink of vice, begins to breathe the pure air of piety, and to taste the delights of love. "Thou hast broken my bonds asunder," exclaims the penitent David in an ecstasy of delight: how happy am I to be of the number of thy servants!—how glorious is it to reckon amongst my ancestors one only soul who has been faithful to thee—more glorious than a long list of potentates and conquerors! "I am thy servant, O Lord, and the son of thy handmaid."—*Ps.*, cxv.

These are the first attractions of grace, and these are its effects on the soul which has never before experienced the force of love, or tasted how sweet is the Lord. But, as for the inconstant Christian, who has so often been in love with piety, and as often returned to his former pleasures, what

new source of enjoyment can he open by a change of life, of which he has not already tasted too often? Ah! if he had a heart of steel, it might be softened by grace, and made susceptible of retaining its impression. But, as the prophet says, he has a heart of wax, susceptible of every impression, and incapable of retaining any: one impression obliterates the former, and the last that is made keeps full possesion till it is succeeded by another. He is fervent in his fits of devotion, and when these are past, he is solely bent on sensual gratifications: his love is centred in God during the moments of compunction, and when these are elapsed, the world alone can satisfy his desires.

If this unhappy man could be convinced of his danger, he would indeed tremble. Our Lord himself says, that "whoever putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God."—*Luke*, ix, 62. 'He does not say that he loseth his title to the kingdom of God, or that he exposeth himself to the danger of being excluded from it; but he is not *fit* for the kingdom of God—that is to say, that his inclinations and dispositions, both of mind and body, render him *unfit* for completing the great work of salvation. When we say that a man is not *fit* for any particular state of life—for the Church, for instance, for the army, or for the law—we mean that his natural and acquired dispositions, are such as to prelude every probability of success in that sense. In the same sense does our Lord say, that of all characters, the character of inconstancy is the most "unfit for the kingdom of God."—*Luke*, ix, 62.

The hardened, the obdurate sinner may be softened into repentance by the unctions of grace: Manasses in chains adores the true God, whose altars he had overturned: the publican does penance: Zaccheus restores his ill-gotten goods: Magdalen washes away her defilements at the feet of Jesus: but an Achab, a Sedeceas, who at one time covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes, and at another wallowed in the mire of sin—who at one time were obedient to the instructive and inspired voice of the prophets and ministers of God, and at another studied to heap the most outrageous insults on their venerable heads—ah! the scriptures no where inform us that they died penitent:—no, their levity, their inconstancy, rendered them *unfit for the Kingdom of God.*

My friends, in order to be a true Christian, a constant disciple of the crucified Jesus, a man must possess a resolute mind: he must know how to choose, and how to abide by his choice: he must not be impeded by obstacles: he must be

guided, not by inclination, but by the rules of the Gospel. There must be that something great, elevating, and noble in his character, which exalts the mind above vulgar prejudices and ideas, and enriches it with true wisdom. He must be separated from the company of the inconstant, who, in the words of St. Jude, may be compared to clouds without water, which are driven about by the winds—to wandering stars, which have no fixed course— to the raging sea, which casts from its bosom the lifeless corpse, and by the next swell of its waves swallows it up again.

3. In the third place, the repenting sinner is confirmed in his resolutions by the sacraments. The awful solemnity of the tribunal of penance, the shame and confusion occasioned by the declaration of his crimes, make an impression on his mind which is not easily effaced. But what advantage does the inconstant Christian derive from this plentiful and last resource? Do these things make an impression on him? No: he is familiarized with confusion; he is hardened against impressions; he changes the waters of life into waters of malediction; he profanes the sacraments.

Yes, I say, he profanes the sacraments; and I appeal to your candour for the truth of my assertion. Can it be said that the man who is constantly sinning and constantly repenting—who rises up from the unclean bed of vice merely to shake himself and lie down again—who says *I have sinned*, in order to sin again with greater freedom—can it be said that such a man is received every time into favour, and made acceptable to God? Ought it not rather be said, that he mocks, that he insults the Almighty, and that he receives the sacraments to his greater condemnation?

I pretend not, however, to insinuate that a worthy participation of the sacraments will fix the soul unchangeably in a state of justification; or, that we must conclude that we have been guilty of a profanation if we fall again into our former sins. But my object is to prove that the man who is truly justified in the sight of God, retains the deep impression for a length of time; and if he falls again, that he falls not immediately, but continues steadfast until time and repeated temptations have obliterated the impression—until many trivial faults have led him on by degrees to the fatal precipice: for no one passes on a sudden from a state of justice to a state of sin.

A true conversion is not the work of a moment. It requires floods of tears, long prayers, painful self-denials, and perseverance in good works. Now, what a person has acquired with such difficulty and labour, he will not easily

part with: he will not on a sudden pass from a state of justice to a state of sin.

A true conversion is a work of firmness and solidity. It forms the sinner into a new creature; it changes the inclinations; it renews the whole man; it builds the house upon a rock. Now, the first breath of temptation cannot destroy that which is capable of withstanding the violence of the united elements. The house that falls as soon as the waves beat and the winds blow, is built on a quicksand.

A true conversion is the work of thought. A person deliberates before he undertakes it—he hesitates—he trembles—he shrinks—he wills, and he wills not—he reckons up the obstacles, and calculates their effects—he is lost in the multitude and variety of his reflections. Now, a work that is undertaken after such mature consideration, certainly will not be abandoned in an instant.

A great change, therefore, must be wrought, when the sinner is duly prepared for the sacrament, and really absolved in the sight of God. You, therefore, of my present hearers who are addicted to mortal sin, you may conclude that, if you are the same after confession as you were before—if you are as eager in the same criminal pursuits—if you feel the same repugnance to fasts, watchings, prayer, and retirement—if you take no precaution to guard against future sins—you, I say, may conclude that, as the finger of God is not visible in your conversion, the Devil is not cast out of your soul. No, my God! when thou recallest a sinner from his evil ways, the effects of thy grace are durable; it is not received and forfeited again almost at the same moment.

For this reason, the pretended repentance of these inconstant souls has been always treated by the saints as public insults offered to the most sacred mysteries of religion. They forbade them to approach the altar, they considered them as unclean, before whom it was unlawful to throw the pearls of the sanctuary—the Holy of Holies. They even suspected the reality of that Christian's repentance who relapsed only once into his former sins. This, however, would be an excess of severity in these times; an excess as detrimental to religion, by deterring the faithful from their duty, as a criminal compliance would be in admitting all indiscriminately. It is, nevertheless, an indubitable truth, that the body of the Lord should not be given to those who have repeatedly profaned it; that reliance should not be placed on promises which have been repeatedly broken; that absolution should not be pronounced when there is every probability that it will draw down the maledictions of Heaven, and strengthen the bad

habits of the false penitent, instead of procuring his discharge from God.

Of all characters, therefore, my beloved friends, the character of inconstancy is the most *unfit* for the Kingdom of Heaven. Hardened sinners, as I have said above, are frequently converted by the means I have described. But these means are insufficient to produce the same effect on the inconstant. Extraordinary means are necessary; and extraordinary means are seldom resorted to by the Almighty. This class of men, nevertheless, are of all others the least aware of their dangerous state. They are lulled into a false security by the sentiments of piety which from time to time accompany them to the altar. The unbounded licentiousness of so many in the present age, who live without God, without religion, without sacraments, sets off to advantage their exterior pious and regular deportment. They are satisfied, because they are not yet arrived to the same pitch of irreligion and immorality. They applaud themselves, because they are regular at the place of worship, and frequent the sacraments. They thank God in their hearts, like the Pharisee, "that they are not like the rest of men."—*Luke*, viii, 11. This comparison flatters their pride, and increases their false security; whereas their whole religion, their whole piety, is no more than the reiterated profanation of the most tremendous mysteries of the Deity.

If there are any in this assembly who live in these alternations of grace and sin—who will neither renounce their passions, nor their devotions—let me entreat them to come to a determination. You cannot serve both God and Baal. If Baal be your god, as a prophet said to the Jews, follow him; but if the Lord be your God, adore him alone. Why these pleasures and these tears? Either dry up your tears, and receive your consolations in this world; or seek that consolation, that pleasure alone which proceeds from virtue and innocence. Have pity on your own souls; come to a determination: fix a solid peace in your interior: embrace the mercies of God which are offered you at this time. Perhaps your inconstancy is hastening to a fatal conclusion. Enter, therefore, the paths of virtue without delay; fix the foundation of your new building on the firm basis of charity, and be no longer like those men, of whom our Lord speaks, who believed in him only for a time. By this means you will be entitled to the crown of glory and immortality in Heaven which is promised to all who persevere faithfully to the end.

XXI.—FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON CONFESSION.

"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be saved."—*James*, v, 16.

On the preceding Sundays, my beloved brethren, I enlarged on the great and manifold duties which are imposed on you at this time: I described the extent of, and the necessity of complying with, the precept of fasting; I admonished you, that the law is not confined to the exterior mortification of the flesh, but that you must rend your hearts, and be converted to the Lord by a true and sincere reformation of life; and lastly, I guarded you against the danger of inconstancy, in order that your repentance might be permanent and effectual. I will now enter upon the second part of my instructions for this time, and explain to you at large the preparation which is required for a worthy participation of the sacred mysteries at the conclusion of this season. I will begin with the sacrament of penance, and it shall form the subject of this and the following discourse.

It is not my intention to enter into a controversial discourse on the institution of this sacrament, because such a disquisition would be unnecessary before a Catholic audience. But I propose to discuss the conditions, on the due and faithful performance of which the whole fruit of the sacrament depends. This, perhaps, may appear at first sight as unnecessary as the subject of its institution, on account of the instructions which you have continued to receive on that head even from your childhood. But if you reflect on the many times you have presented yourselves at the sacred tribunal, and the little fruit that you have hitherto reaped, you must conclude that there are some deficiencies on your part, and that it is the duty of the pastor to scrutinize them, and to prescribe the remedies. On the part of God there can be no deficiency: the blood of Jesus is as powerful now as at any former period. All the defects, therefore, must be laid entirely to your charge, and in compliance with my duty I will examine them, and lay before you the means of effecting their cure. I shall reduce them to three heads, by observing, first, that you either acquire not a perfect knowledge of the state of your interior; or, secondly, that you confess not your sins with sufficient candour and explicitness; or, lastly, that

you are deficient in the most indispensable part, which is that of contrition.

1. Man, generally speaking, is a mystery to himself. Being influenced in all his decisions and guided in all his actions by self-love, he always views his own conduct on the most favourable side, and is generally the last person who discovers the faults into which this deceitful prompter has beguiled him.

This fatal ignorance of the true state of our souls can be dispelled only by two means; first, by a deliberate and attentive examination of our conscience; and secondly, by a strict attention to the relative duties of our state.

In the first place, the whole life of a Christian ought to be devoted to self-examination. We must scrutinize every thought, every word, every action: we must not desist even for one hour; for we experience such a continual and rapid succession of desires, of jealousies, of fears, of hopes, of troubles, of hatred, and love, that if the thread is but once broken in our recollection, we are instantly lost: if we cease for an instant to follow the secret windings of the passions in our souls, we know neither their extent nor their consequences: all is confusion on account of the multiplicity of things; our conscience is formed into an abyss which we cannot fathom; the surface alone is open to our view.

It is an error, therefore, to suppose that, after a long time spent in tepidity, and in a dissipated and worldly life, an hour or two spent in examination is sufficient to discover the true state of your interior. You must be habituated to give a daily account of yourselves to your own souls: you must enter into judgment on every action, if not frequently in the day, at least, during the silence of the night, after the labours, fatigues, and pastimes of the day are concluded; you must, like the royal prophet (*Ps.*, cxvii, 109), place your souls in your hands before the Lord, and weigh in his sight every action that you have performed. By this means alone can you be familiarized with yourselves, and be disposed to carry to the sacred tribunal hearts that have been already judged.

But, is it in this manner that you prepare yourselves for the sacrament of penance? The generality of Christians live in such a state of dissipation that they dare not look into their own hearts: the closet of their interior is a place of melancholy and sadness, from which they fly with precipitation; they dread the idea of being left alone to their own reflections: they avoid with solicitude every thought about their past disorders. You, perhaps, my beloved, are of this unhappy number, and therefore I will ask you, whether it is

possible that in the space of one hour you should be able to explore the intricate windings of your passions, whether it be possible that so many unjust desires, so many criminal indulgences, so much tepidity, so many distractions, so many compliances with self-will, so many injurious words, so many reflections on our neighbours, such frequent hatreds and animosities, so many sinful thoughts, so many crimes which you have occasioned in others, the greatest part of which were sedulously erased from your mind almost as soon as committed—whether it is possible, I say, that such an abyss should be so suddenly enlightened, and that such a disordered state of conscience, to which you have hitherto been strangers, should so suddenly be made known, and become as it were familiar to you.

That such a thing is impossible you must readily acknowledge, consequently you yourselves must draw this conclusion—that the person who neglects the sacrament of penance for any length of time, and is inattentive to the daily examination of his conscience, must necessarily be deficient in the knowledge of his interior, and ought to attribute in part to this cause the little fruit which he has hitherto reaped from his confessions.

I must observe, likewise, that a very notable defect arises from another quarter: you examine not the sins you commit in relation to the various capacities in which you stand: as a parent for instance—as a private individual—as a tradesman—as a servant, and so on: you attend only to personal failings in general terms, and omit the relative duties of your state and calling.

As parents, you are bound to consider your children, not as properly belonging to you, but as a sort of trust committed to your care by the providence of God. Him you are to consider as their Father, and yourselves, as merely occupying for a time the place of guardians.

The duties of this guardianship are manifold and great. It is incumbent on you to bring them up in the fear of their Heavenly Father, to prevent their entrance into the broad road of the world, to lead them by the hand into the narrow path of virtue and piety, to convince them of the vanity and emptiness of all things here below, and to warm their innocent bosoms with the flames of charity and divine love. These are your duties in quality of parents—duties which are indispensable and incommutable. Nevertheless, how many are there, who confine their solicitude for their children to earthly things—who leave the task of instructing them in piety to their pastors, and then frustrate by their own example the

instructions which they have received—who invite and even force them to take part with the world, at the time that they commission their directors to solicit them to take part with Jesus; how many, I say, are there of this description! and how few who make this the subject of their examination!—Again, you have many duties to perform in respect to your servants. You are their father and pastor, as long as they are under your command: and if you neglect their spiritual welfare, you become, as the scripture expresses it, worse than infidels: and do you ever examine yourselves on this head?

Moreover, as members of the body of the faithful, you owe to your brethren the example of an edifying and irreprehensible life. The more exalted you are, the stricter is the obligation; because your example is either more efficacious or more pernicious in proportion to your rank. As members of the true Church, it is a duty incumbent on you to shine like lights to those who sit in the shades of error and infidelity—to display before them, by the purity of your lives, the holiness of your religion—and to convince them, if possible, of the truth of your faith by your strict adherence to the rules of the gospel. But where are the Catholics whose lives are stricter, whose morals are more evangelical, whose example is more edifying than that of their unbeleving brethren? And yet this subject never enters into their examination.

Again, if you are engaged in business, you are bound to follow the strictest line of justice; to be scrupulous in your dealings; and, if in trade, to see that all the orders which you receive are properly executed, and that every article, in point of durability and real worth, is answerable to the price you set upon it, and to the intentions of your employer. If you are in service, you are bound to be exact in the performance of your duties; to avoid extravagance and waste; to confine your perquisites within the bounds of allowance; and neither to give away, nor to assume to yourselves more than the will of your master has consented to.

These are your duties, and these must all form a part of your examination. But, alas! after you have read over the catalogue of sins in your prayer books, you conclude that your examination has been sufficiently minute. Although you enter into a new state, although it may happen that your obligations are increased, that you are entrusted with five talents, instead of two or one, your examination is still the same as it was before. Ah! this is not acting like disciples of Jesus: this is not judging yourselves as you will hereafter be judged.

The just man is minute in every point; he approaches to the sacred tribunal with fear and trembling; he accuses himself in the bitterness of his soul of the smallest imperfections; he discovers even in his works of piety matter for accusation and causes for penance; he is afraid that the involuntary feelings of nature were free acts of his will; he imagines that he discovers in the first motions to sin the guilt of having fully consented to it, although at the very time he acquired merit by an immediate resistance; he is diffident even of the experience of his director when he endeavours to expel his fears; and, like St. Peter in the excess of his prayer at Joppa, he fancies that he beholds objects forbidden by the law, even when an angel from Heaven condemns his scruples and commands him to eat.

And whence arises this difference? The one keeps a constant watch over his heart; the other neglects examination till he commences his preparation for confession. The one judges himself according to the maxims of the gospel; the other is influenced by the prejudices of self-love. The one examines himself strictly on all the duties of his state: the other looks no farther than to the open violations of the law, of which he knows neither the extent nor the consequences. It is thus, O God, that thou enlightenest the hearts of the just, and that thou punishest the crimes of the worldling, by permitting him to conceal them from his own eyes.

2. The second general defect is a want of sincerity in the confession of our sins. Nothing is more repugnant to the nature of man, than the acknowledgment of guilt. Pride is his predominant passion, and therefore, being conscious of innumerable failings, and dreading the confusion which would attend their publicity, he has recourse to artifice and dissimulation in order to conceal them from the eyes of others.

This is his nature—but how truly deplorable is it that this pride should influence him even in his acts of humiliation; and that he should carry his dissimulation even to the foot of that great tribunal, where he presents himself on purpose to declare the secrets of his conscience, and to judge himself before Christ.

I allow, indeed, that few Christians are so far abandoned as to come with a determined resolution of lying to the Holy Ghost. To people of this description instructions would be of little service: the thunders of the Almighty alone could rouse them; the language of St. Peter to Ananias and Sapphira would be the only language calculated to make an impression on their hearts.

But there is a dissimulation of a different kind—a dissimulation, which endeavours to palliate, and sometimes to excuse entirely, the sins confessed. Of this dissimulation we are guilty when we endeavour to expose our sins in the most favourable light; when we are solicitous to extenuate their enormity in the eyes of our director; when we confess our greatest crimes in the fewest words, in order to avoid inquiries; when we pass over in silence circumstances and incidents which increase the sin, and which are sometimes more criminal than the sins themselves; and when, instead of entering into a minute explication, we substitute vague and general expressions, which declare the actions, but which expose not the true state of our interior.

My friends, the language of a contrite heart is an humble, simple, natural, sincere language. It is a stranger both to dissimulation and forced excuses. It explains the beginning, the progress, the minutest circumstances, and the consequences of every crime. Instead of endeavouring to extenuate the guilt, it exposes it in the most odious colours before the minister of God. But how little is this language known! How few in number are the Christians who confess their sins without dissimulation! If we confessed to man only, such an artifice would succeed; it would be easy to deceive a judge who could not penetrate the recesses of the mind. But we confess to Jesus Christ, who has been invisibly the witness of the whole history of our lives, who reads in our hearts, as in an open book, the most hidden secrets, and who, at the time that we endeavour to impose on his minister by our hypocrisy, laughs at the ridiculous efforts of our shame; and upbraids us, as the prophet upbraided the queen of Israel who endeavoured to deceive him under a borrowed dress: "Why dost thou feign thyself to be another?"—3 *Kings*, xiv, 6. Senseless man! Dost thou think to conceal thy shame with a thin veil from the sight of him whose eye pierces the deepest abyss? Knowest thou not, that thou attemptest to hide thy desperate and corrupted wounds from him from whom alone thou canst expect a cure?

We are guilty of dissimulation, in the second place, when we neglect to examine into the motives and principles which occasioned our sins. Religion informs us that the whole merit and demerit of every action depend solely on the intentions and dispositions of the heart. In order, therefore, to be fully acquainted with their nature, it is necessary that we trace them to their very source. If we are addicted, for instance, to calumny and detraction, we must examine from whence this disposition takes its rise; whether it be from

pride, envy, or avarice: if to swearing, quarreling, or hatred, whether it be attributable to the loss of the fear of God, or to a passionate and revengeful temper: if to intemperance and sensuality, whether it proceeds from the spirit of irreligion or from an inordinate attachment to earthly things, if to the sins of the flesh, whether it originate from a rooted and obstinate affection for those brutal pleasures, or from courting the company of the objects which excite them.

These are indispensable subjects of inquiry, and must be held in view through the whole course of our examination; otherwise we shall never acquire a competent knowledge of the extent either of our sins, or of the corruption of our hearts. If, therefore, we are negligent in this point, we are guilty of dissimulation, by voluntarily concealing the true state of our interior both from ourselves and from the director of our consciences.

And yet how common is this dissimulation, and how serious are the consequences! Your confession is not succeeded by that peace and serenity of mind which attend a good confession: you feel that you are not disburthened of that heavy load of guilt which oppressed your souls: you continue to be the devoted victims of anxiety and remorse: your hearts tell you that you are not peace with God.

Senseless as you are! why will you foster in your breasts a serpent which may so easily be dislodged? You undergo the humiliation of confession, and by your insincerity, you deprive yourselves of its consolations. You publicly declare that you are sinners, and this declaration, which is so painful to human nature, becomes one of your greatest crimes.

Be no longer deceived, Christian brethren. Suffer not the enemy of your souls to impose on you by his delusive artifices. Your salvation depends on the worthily receiving the sacrament of penance. Arise, therefore, from the abyss. Subject every motion of your souls to a strict examination. Investigate minutely in what manner you perform the duties of your state, to what good purpose you employ the talents entrusted to you. Open your hearts without reserve to the minister of God. Display the true state of your interior before his eyes. Be not satisfied with a mere verbal declaration of your sins, but expose the causes; lay open the root of the evil. Then, if you are truly contrite, you will obtain the pardon of them, you will enjoy the consolations of penance, and you will receive grace to live holily and piously for the future.

XXIII.—THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR BLESSED LADY.

ON THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin....And the virgin's name was Mary."—*Luke*, i. 26.

That the ways of God are not like the ways of men, and that the designs of Eternal Wisdom are in direct opposition to the notions of worldly wisdom, is a truth which is particularly displayed in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. Yes, beloved Christians, the idea of a God descending from his throne of glory in order to raise his creatures to honour and dignity; of a God taking on himself the punishment of our infirmities, and enduring the punishment which we, the unhappy transgressors, ought alone to have endured; of a God uniting himself with man, in order to unite man with God; this idea, I say, has been in all ages a scandal and a folly to the wisdom of the flesh; and even to this day, the wisdom of God in this mystery is concealed from the understanding of the worldly wise. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery," says St. Paul, "which is hidden .....which none of the princes of this world knew."—1 *Cor.*, ii, 7, 8.

According to the world, true greatness is attained only by achievements which excite the admiration and applause of men, and true happiness is to be found only in the enjoyment of sensual ease and pleasure. The world claims to itself the exclusive privilege of judging of everything by the light of reason; it sees nothing with the eyes of faith. Even in its attempts to unravel the inscrutable designs of Providence, reason is the criterion by which it judges.

This is the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of God is entirely opposite. In this mystery, in particular, the folly of such calculations is made clearly manifest. The poverty and humiliation of a God-man loudly proclaim that the creature cannot seek to be exalted, but in defiance of the laws of strict justice, and that the greatness which alone is worthy of his ambition is to be attained, not by riches and honours, but by walking in the lowly paths which were trodden by his Divine Master. Secondly, the voluntary subjection of the Son of God to privations and sufferings, informs us that the sinner has forfeited his right to the enjoyment of worldly

pleasures. Thirdly, the incomprehensibility of this mystery proves, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the mysteries of revelation far surpass the powers of human reason, and consequently that they are not to be submitted to its investigation. These three points shall form the subjet of this discourse,

1. In order to place before your eyes in a proper light the important instructions which may be deduced from this adorable mystery, it will be necessary to describe the principal characteristics of human pride, and their opposition to the humiliation of the Son of God in his union with our nature.

Pride, in the first place, claims an imaginary merit from the possession of wealth, honour, and reputation; and to these it declares that homage is due, without any reference either to the virtues or vices of the possessor.

The circumstances which attended the Incarnation of the Eternal Word prove, on the other hand, that the glory of the world is vain, and that the grace and friendship of God is the only source whence real honour can be derived. Who would not have supposed but that a mystery, the figure of which had been so splendid, the preparation so grand, and the promises so magnificent, would have been accomplished in the fulness of time, with every demonstration that could add lustre to the event; and that, when the God of Heaven vouchsafed to visit his creatures, he would have appeared surrounded with glory and majesty, which would have insured to him the homage and submission of the whole universe? But the designs which the wisdom of God had in view were to be effected by other means. This, the greatest mystery of the Deity, is performed in the greatest obscurity. The chaste virgin, who is preferred to all others, and in whose womb is wrought the ineffable secret of the humiliation of a God, is distinguished from the rest of her tribe by her innocence and purity alone. The splendour of her descent from the royal stock of David is veiled in poverty. The heavens are not opened with that awful solemnity, as they formerly were on a less solemn occasion, when the glory of the Lord descended on Mount Sinai: the angels are not commissioned to announce his arrival by the sound of trumpets and thunders: the mountains do not reëcho the canticles of the heavenly choirs: the clouds hold their accustomed majestic course, and are not suffered to stoop to rain down the Just One. A single messenger from Heaven, invisible to the rest of mankind, appears under a human form to Mary in the silence of retirement, and in one of the remotest corners of Judea. Even Joseph himself is not acquainted with the heavenly embassy. In all the painful mysteries of our redemption, the humiliations

of the Son of God are attended with the greatest publicity: in this, all is performed in obscurity; because it was the design of Eternal Wisdom to correct the false opinions of mankind, and to substitute the virtues of faith in the place of the former illusions of human wisdom.

It had hitherto been the received opinion, that temporal prosperity was an indubitable testimony of the favours of Heaven—that a great name was a real blessing, and that splendid talents were invariably the gift of a propitious Deity. But in this mystery the wisdom of God discloses to us another order of things, other blessings, other honours, other distinctive marks of glory. It informs us that innocence and virtue are the only riches of man: that the merit of the faithful soul is centered in the heart: that the lowest degree of charity exalts the Christian to a higher pitch of glory than the empire of the whole world: that patience, humility, and meekness are the most estimable qualities of the disciple of Jesus; and that the conquest of his passions in the sight of God alone is a more substantial, a more permanent honour, than the conquest of provinces and kingdoms.

This is the new order of things which the mystery of the incarnation has disclosed to mankind. But, my beloved friends, what effect has it hitherto produced? Is it not true, that the world is as much attached to earthly glory in these days of Christianity as it was in the days of ignorance? Where is the man who contemplates with the eyes of faith the empty pageantry of human greatness, and who reserves his admiration for the gifts of grace and the merits of holiness? To whom do you pay the greatest homage? To the ambitious leader who, at the head of a numerous host, conquers kingdoms, and makes the world resound with the fame of his exploits; or to the just man, surrounded by his innocence alone, who suffers injuries and affronts in silence, who endures humiliations with joy, who stifles the swellings of resentment, who fights and conquers for Heaven? By what honours do you yourselves seek to be distinguished? Are they the honours which flow from a more lively faith, a more ardent charity, a more pure conscience, a more inviolable fidelity to all your duties? Far from it: in general, you are solicitous only for the distinction of birth, of riches, and of talents: you disregard the greatness and dignity which are derived from innocence and grace: you look down with indifference on those actions which have eternity alone for their object. But, my beloved, why will you not attend to the instructive lesson which is enforced by an authority not human, but divine; not of men, but of God himself? Is it

in reason not to act up to the conviction of your own minds? Why, then, since you know it, should you hesitate to act as if you were thoroughly convinced, that to be great or contemptible in the eyes of men is a matter of very little consequence; that you can arrogate to yourselves no more than what you possess in the sight of God; that faith strips you of your borrowed ornaments, and exposes your true state to view?

Pride, indeed, attends to the exterior alone, and this may be called its second characteristic. According to its maxims, virtue and vice are matters of serious consideration only when they happen to be publicly known; that they have no inherent qualities of their own; and that there is no other praise or censure to be courted or dreaded, than that which is excited by the approbation or disapprobation of our fellow mortals.

In order, therefore, to teach us that the judgments of this world are vain; that neither its censures are to be dreaded, nor its applauses courted; and that the Christian is to be solicitous for the approbation of God alone, our Blessed Saviour voluntarily submits to the greatest humiliation, puts on the appearance of a slave, and becomes as it were the outcast of all.

Omitting the reasons for this wonderful conduct on the part of God, let us examine whether it has produced its effect on the morals of mankind. Are we all convinced of the impropriety of being influenced solely by the opinions of others? Are we all convinced that it is impossible to please men, and to be at the same time true servants of Christ; that this is not the day of our manifestation; and that we have no right whatever to expect that our characters will be fully known and established until the day when we shall appear with Christ in glory? Ah! so far from having reason to hope that these are the sentiments of the world at large, it is but too manifest that the care and attention which are paid to the opinion and applause of men, even by those who profess to follow righteousness, could not have been much greater if the pursuit of them had been recommended and enforced by the example of our Divine Master himself. We do everything to be seen by men: even in works of humiliation, this is our usual failing. We see it on almost every occasion, and in every occurrence. The general practice is, to speak slightly of our own actions, and to humble ourselves before others. If you think that this is done in general from good and Christian motives, you are wrong. Men frequently stoop, only that they may rise the higher. If

we are better spoken of than we deserve, that circumstance augments our pride: we are pleased with the praises which our hearts and consciences disallow: we pride ourselves on the mistaken judgment of others, and are more flattered by the error which ascribes to us only an imaginary importance, than humbled by the sense we have of our own real unworthiness. If we conceal ourselves, it is only in hopes that we shall be discovered: if we shun applause, it is only that applause might follow us: if we can perform extraordinary works of penance, alms-deeds, or prayer, we are solicitous that they should be publicly known; and if we pretend to conceal them, we take precautions that they should be discovered by other means. Pride has numberless ways of attaining its ends; and no virtue is more uncommon than voluntary humility exercised with the sole view of appearing little and contemptible in the eyes of men.

Our Divine Redeemer, on the contrary, clothes himself with the appearances of sin on purpose to endure its reproach. He takes on himself our iniquities merely to become the victim. He refuses to be made king, only that he might die like a slave. The most disgraceful outrages are the recompense of his humiliations. Man disowns him to the end, and he expires in the very arms of ignominy and shame.

Let us, my beloved, frequently cast our eyes on this divine model, and contemplate the humiliations of the Word Incarnate. Let us reflect, that pride is the parent of almost all our crimes, and that the eradication of the greater number of our failings depends on the destruction of this vice. Let us incessantly upbraid ourselves for this incongruous alliance of weakness with vanity; of the humbling law of the flesh with the exalted pretensions of pride; of what we wish to appear, with what we really are in the sight of God. Then, after being convinced that we ought not to be exalted in the presence of an humbled God, let us reflect that the disciples of a Saviour who became a man of sorrows for their redemption and example, cannot in justice pretend to a life of ease and enjoyment.

2. Had man continued in the state of original justice, he might have claimed the right to a life of uninterrupted happiness and peace; but, having fallen from that happy state, he is entitled only to sufferings and misery. The man who is unworthy of life, has no right to enjoyments: pleasure is a fruit to which he has no claim, and labour and toil are his only due.

In order that this unwelcome truth might be deeply fixed in our minds, in order that we might be induced to love that

which, since the fall, is become indispensable, our Lord himself endured ignominy and pain: he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should walk in his footsteps, and learn to suffer for ourselves. For this reason, the ministry of the Word Incarnate was a ministry of tribulations. He bequeathed his cross to his disciples: he calls those only happy, whose days are embittered by sufferings; and lest any favourable interpretations might be put on his maxims, he voluntarily expires in the most excruciating tortures.

Since, therefore, the Word Eternal, whose every word and action was intended to promote our instruction in the ways of life, led a painful and sorrowful existence during the days of his mortality, the Christian cannot arrive at the happy term of salvation by the paths of ease and pleasure. A God-man is the head of the Christian body, and we are the members. As members, we must partake in the sufferings of the head, and our lot in this world must be similar to his.

With this great example before our eyes, can we, with any appearance of reason, entertain the idea, that the man who leads an indolent and sensual life—who is conformed in every thing to the world and to his will, although perhaps it tends not to the violation of an express command, that such a man, I say, is sufficiently animated with the Spirit of God, and complies with the laws of the gospel as far as is sufficient to insure his salvation? We cannot say it. It was not thus that the apostles announced the gospel to our ancestors. The spirit of the gospel is a holy eagerness of suffering, an incessant attention to mortify self-love, to do violence to the will, to restrain the desires, to deprive the senses of useless gratifications: this is the essence of Christianity, the soul of piety. If you have not this spirit, you belong not, says the apostle, to Jesus Christ: it is of no consequence that you are not of the number of the impure and sacrilegious, of whom the apostle speaks, and who will not be admitted into the kingdom of God. You are equally strangers to him; your sentiments are not his; you still live according to nature; you belong not to the grace of our Saviour; you will therefore perish, for it is on him alone, according to the apostle, that he has placed our salvation.

A complaint is sometimes made, that we render piety disgusting and impracticable by prohibiting many pleasures which the world authorises. But, my beloved friends, what is it we tell you? Allow yourselves all the pleasures which Christ would have allowed himself; faith allows you no other: mix with your piety all the gratifications which Jesus

Christ would have mixed in his; the gospel allows no greater indulgence. This is the spirit of piety. If you have not this spirit, your exemption from grosser crimes will not avail you to salvation: you belong not to Christ, and you will have no part in him.

Severe as this doctrine may appear to flesh and blood, the experience of every true Christian assures us that it is rendered easy and agreeable by the most pure, the most enviable consolations. The seat of true pleasure is not in the senses, but in the heart; there it is that the graces of the Lord flow in abundance. Although the just man appear sorrowful and dejected in the eyes of others, an invisible Comforter replenishes his heart with most chaste delights—delights, of which the sensual man can form no conception. Oh! that the world knew where true happiness was to be found.

3. Lastly, the mystery of the Incarnation is intended to humble the pride of man, by obliging him to captivate his understanding to the belief of an article which surpasses his comprehension.

The Author of your being has appointed that you should work out your salvation, not by reason, but by faith. The great truths of religion are to be discovered, not by the efforts, but by the submission of the understanding; the secrets of Heaven are shown only *in a dark manner* (1 *Cor.*, xiii, 12); and you must believe in order to understand.

How frequently, nevertheless, do Christian philosophers assume to themselves the right of judging concerning the mysteries of faith! They call in question every thing that appears wonderful or inconceivable. They doubt the existence of those eternal flames which the divine justice has prepared for the unchaste and the impious: they dare to examine, whether children can inherit the punishment due to the crime of their forefather; and whether our innate corruption be not the offspring of nature, instead of the consequence of sin: they doubt whether the gratification of our sensual desires—desires which seem to be implanted in our very existence—can be imputed to us as crimes according to the laws of justice. They criticise the wonderful prodigies recorded in the Bible, and attempt to account by natural causes for the facts which the faith of our ancestors attributed solely to the extraordinary interposition of the Omnipotent.

But, my beloved, reflect that you adore a God made man. This alone is sufficient to silence your objections. Professing this belief, it is folly, says an ancient father, to call in question any other mystery, merely because it is inaccessible

to reason. There is no incomprehensible mystery which Jesus Christ, God-man, does not divest of its incredibility. Either, then, renounce Jesus Christ, or acknowledge that God can do more than you can comprehend: either blaspheme with the impious, and say that he is no more than the son of Joseph and Mary, or, if you confess that he is the Christ the Son of God, refuse not your assent to the other mysteries of faith.

Let us rather emulate the docility of Mary, who on this day became the Mother of the Word Incarnate. What could be more incomprehensible to human nature, than that she could be both mother and virgin, and that the child which was to be born of her should be called the Son of the Most High? Nevertheless, no sooner is this mystery announced to her by the heavenly messenger, than, without even asking for a sign from Heaven, she believes, and acknowledges the power of God. Zachary, on the contrary, with the examples of Sarah and the mother of Samuel before his eyes, hesitates, and disbelieves. A simple and innocent virgin immediately bows down before the omnipotence of God: a priest learned in the law doubts, and calls in question the divine power. Great learning generally takes away from the simplicity of faith; as if the more we were enlightened by worldly wisdom, the less we were able to penetrate the clouds which envelope the mysteries of the Deity.

Live, therefore, by faith: begin by purifying your hearts: innocence is the source of true wisdom. Invite Jesus into your souls: with him you will possess all the treasures of learning: be ardent in love; this is the only avenue to truth; you cannot know God until you love him. Reflect, that a corrupted heart cannot possess a pure and sound reason, fit for the contemplation of heavenly things. The nearer you approach to God by grace, the more will you be enlightened: the greater advances you make in the way of his commandments, the more will you increase in spiritual wisdom, and the more clearly will you behold those divine truths which we shall hereafter contemplate without a veil, when we are become like to him, who on this day is become like to us.

XXIV.—PASSION SUNDAY.

ON CONTRITION.

"Jesus said to the Jews, who amongst you shall convince me of sin?"—*John*, viii, 46.

In this gospel our blessed Saviour warmly asserts his innocence, and with indignation refutes the calumnies of the Jews. But why this warmth in the breast of the meek, the humble Jesus? Was he not the Lamb of whom it is said, that he should be led to the slaughter without opening his mouth? Was it not he whose meekness would not suffer him to break the bruised reed, nor to extinguish the smoking flax? Why then this warmth and indignation? The reason is obvious. He came on earth to suffer, and to shed his blood for our salvation, and on that account he met sufferings with joy. But in quality of our High Priest—holy—innocent—and undefiled, he could not be silent under the imputation of sin. So infinite was his hatred of the crime of rebellion against the Almighty, that he could not endure that the testimony of others, however unfounded, should lay it to his charge.

What an instructive lesson, my beloved, may be drawn from this example of our Saviour! What a perfect idea may be formed of the sorrow which ought to rend our hearts, when we survey the multiplied guilt which we have incurred by our sins! This subject may be treated with peculiar propriety at this time: for, now it is that every member of the Church will be summoned to approach the sacred tribunal of reconciliation, and wash away his defilement in the precious blood of the Lamb; now it is that every sinner will be called upon to excite in his soul the most unfeigned detestation of sin, and to return to the Lord by a true and hearty sorrow for all his past disloyalties. To this subject, therefore, I will call your attention; and I trust that a just delineation of the essential requisites of contrition will produce the most beneficial effects at this season.

1. Contrition, in the first place, is a supernatural virtue, and consequently depends on the coöperation of divine grace. Man of himself is too weak, too much under the influence of terrestrial and present objects, to be greatly affected either by the goods or evils of a future life: and therefore, unless he be aided and assisted by the grace of God, he is incapable of raising his soul to those sublime conceptions which constitute

the essence of supernatural virtues. Of this nature is contrition. It consists in a determined hatred of sin, infused by the Holy Ghost, on account of its opposition to the infinite sanctity of the Deity: it consists in a sincere and heartfelt grief for the sins already committed—a grief occasioned by the clear view with which the sinner beholds, by the light of faith, the outrage which he has offered to God, and the evils which he has entailed on himself: it consists in a fixed resolution to avoid all sin for the future—a resolution inspired by the love which the repentant sinner begins to entertain for God, the source of all justice. This is true contrition. Sorrow which is not founded on these principles is imperfect, and insufficient to complete the great work of justification.

Now, my beloved friends, let me entreat you to look into your souls, and examine whether these are the sentiments which have hitherto accompanied you to the sacred tribunal of penance. In preparing for this sacrament, it is probable that you have more than once experienced something of the bitterness of sin: your minds have been much agitated, and your hearts have been secretly troubled within you. But from what did this proceed? From a sincere grief for having offended so great and so good a benefactor? This would be much, for this is everything: but this, alas! is by no means always the case. In general, I very much fear, it is quite otherwise. We have much to do whenever we are at war with our natural propensities. The sight of our manifold offences, numerous as they are, would oftentimes occasion little anxiety within us, if the indignity which is thereby offered to the majesty of the God of Heaven were the only consideration we had to look to. We look to ourselves in general, and seldom to anything besides. It is the fear of disclosing to our director the enormities which we would gladly hide even from our own inspection—it is this circumstance which, more than any other consideration, is the thing that so terribly appals us. This, my beloved, is no unusual occurrence. There is no man, however low in his own esteem, who, if he thinks he is going to lower himself in the esteem of another, does not feel a sensible regret. Thus it happens that pride is oftentimes mistaken for repentance, and the natural aversion which all of us feel towards self-debasement for true sorrow and compunction for sin. It is our vanity that is humbled: we feel the remorse which this circumstance naturally instils into our minds; and we immediately conclude that we are in full possession of all that is most essentially necessary, namely, the sincere sorrow of an humble and contrite heart.

The sensations, however, which are created by this shame are not to be indiscriminately condemned; for, a salutary confusion is invariably the attendant on true contrition, and there is a shame which leads to salvation: "All the day long," exclaims the royal prophet, "my shame is before me, and the confusion of my face hath covered me."—*Ps.*, xliii, 16. But then, this confusion must arise from the same principle as the contrition itself. The just man is *sorry* for his sins because they offend his God; and he is confounded at the sight of his sins for the same reason, namely, because they are exposed in their most odious colours before the eyes of an omniscient Deity. As for the contempt or ridicule of men, he sets it completely at nought: the contempt of God is his only subject of alarm. The true penitent, therefore, is overwhelmed with confusion when he exposes the secrets of his conscience; but his confusion bears no kind of similitude to that which originates in pride and self-love.

It likewise frequently happens that, after we have examined the state of our interior, and after we have discovered the multitude and enormity of our offences, we are seized with terror and consternation. Hell and eternity seem to stare us in the face; and the dread of that terrible abyss, on the brink of which we have been heedlessly sporting, rushes powerfully on the mind. Under the influence of some such terrifying impressions as these, we throw ourselves before the minister of Christ, we confess our sins, and readily conclude that our sorrow is sufficiently intense to find acceptance with God, and move him to be reconciled to us. My dear friends, I do not say that this is at all times the case; but they would gladly continue on in their vicious course, if they knew that the loss of his love, or the withdrawing of his friendship, would be the only consequence that would ensue from their iniquitous proceedings.

I acknowledge that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and that it is salutary to penetrate frequently with the eyes of faith the dreadful abyss of fire and darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; to descend in spirit into hell, and by the view of future torments, to place a restraint on the lawless passions of the breast. I acknowledge that this fear is a gift of the Holy Ghost; and far be it from me to deprive sinners of a means of salvation, and of a motive for compunction, which Christ himself held out, which the Church recommends, which the saints had continually before their eyes, and which we ourselves daily employ, with the view of disturbing the slumbers in which sinners pass their days. For, my God! if, notwith-

standing thy threats of avenging flames—if, notwithstanding the view of hell and its eternal torments which thy justice has prepared for sinners—if, I say, iniquity still prevails on the earth, and all flesh hath corrupted its way, would there be any faith remaining among men, were we imprudently to endeavour to turn away their eyes from this dismal spectacle; or were we to declare that the motive the most common and the most universal, ought to be disregarded? The noble and generous souls, whom love alone attaches to the service of their Maker, are few in number. Love is the wisdom of the perfect. The weak stand in need of indulgence, and God willingly consents that self-interest should be one great incitement to their fidelity.

The fear of the torments, therefore, which God has reserved for the wicked, is one ingredient of contrition, but it is not the only one nor the principal one. Love alone drew our hearts from God, and love alone can restore them to him. Love caused the depravation of our will, and love must restore it to its primitive state of subjection. Love, therefore, is the principal ingredient of contrition; we must begin to love God in preference to all creatures: and then the virtue of the sacrament, united with this love, although perhaps it may not have attained its perfection, will effect our reconciliation with God, and complete our justification. I exclude not, I say, from contrition the fear of punishment: I exclude only the criminal dispositions of those men, who, if there were no torments, no hell in store, would live like atheists, without a sense either of morality or religion, without the use of any of our sacred institutions: who are callous to every sentiment of love; who are roused only by the threats of future judgments; and who in their own minds are grieved that God is just, and that he has attached eternal torments to the most shameful excesses.

You may say, perhaps, that few men are influenced by these unchristian dispositions. Ah! would to God that your assertion was founded on truth. But experience too plainly demonstrates that the number is very few who are not actuated by them. Fear is almost the whole of our religion. We divorce ourselves from our passions only for a moment: we separate ourselves from them as from objects which are dear to us, but dangerous. Like the wife of Lot, we do not hate Sodom, we are afraid only of the flames. The spirit of true piety is less diffused in the world than you imagine. Our virtues are, for the most part, counterfeit virtues. We entertain, indeed, a hatred for mortal sin, but for what reason? Because it will be succeeded by eternal torments. This is

manifest from our unconcern about venial sins, which, because they will not subject us to the same miserable eternity, we commit with little or no scruple, notwithstanding their opposition to the sanctity of God. If, therefore, we impartially scrutinize the affections of our hearts, we shall discover that few of our actions are influenced by principles either of grace or love, and that hell is almost the only object of our fears.

But how are we to discover the real dispositions of our souls; and by what marks are we to distinguish whether the perturbation of our minds on these solemn occasions is the offspring of true repentance, or whether it only originates in the sense of shame, the effect of our wounded pride, mixed with a low and mercenary fear? In plain terms, (for my wish is to set you right in a matter which, though little thought of, is of the utmost consequence) in plain terms, then, if the fear which is so apt to beset us on these occasions, is not accompanied with a real and sincere resolution of forsaking the ways of sin, and embracing a life of true Christian piety in future, be assured that it is not the effect of sincere sorrow, and that it has nothing in it that can possibly connect it with true repentance. "Wilt thou be made whole?" said our Saviour to a man stricken with the palsy. The same question is proposed to you, whenever you approach the sacred tribunal of penance. Will you be made whole? Do you wish for a perfect cure? Are you bent upon renouncing your former bad habits; and do you, before God, and with a deliberative mind firmly resolve to enter upon a new life—a life of true Christian piety for the future?

This, my beloved brethren, is the question proposed to you, and what answer are you prepared to make? Will you candidly declare that you are resolved to break the chains which bind you to the world, and to labour henceforward for salvation, by the uniform and constant practice of Christian virtues? Remember that the question is not, whether you have made vague and indefinite resolutions of amendment—resolutions which will never be put in execution, and which are only calculated to deceive the penitent, and cause him to perpetrate the horrid sacrilege without the consciousness of the crime, and consequently without remorse: but the question is, have you that strong, that complete, that sincere will to be reformed, which has given proofs of its determination by the tears of compunction which it has already drawn from you? *Will you be made whole?* This is the question which is proposed to you in the name of Jesus. Your conscience cannot

here deceive you. A moment's reflection will discover whether you are sincere or not. All the preliminaries of a thorough conversion of the heart to God, are as strongly marked as anything in nature can be. They are instantly distinguished; they cannot be mistaken. Tears, conflicts, interior troubles, new plans of conduct, sensations which, perhaps, you never felt before—these are the pangs which announce the birth of the new man in the soul. In the midst of such tumults, in the conflicts of such impetuous winds as these, if I may be allowed the expression, the Spirit of God descends on the penitent heart, as he did on the apostles, and he descends with his best gifts.

Examine yourselves, therefore, my beloved friends—you, I mean, whose lives have been devoted to the world and sin; see whether the protestations you have made to alter your plan of life for the future have been marked with this kind of trepidation and sorrow—these unequivocal tokens of a true repentance—whenever you presented yourselves at the sacred tribunal of reconciliation.

My object is not to aggravate the matter, but to state it to you exactly as it is. Let no man say, that the sorrow which is concealed in the interior of the soul is sometimes without any very sensible operation on the mind. To argue on such a supposition would be wrong. A change of life is in such direct opposition to our favourite inclinations, and is brought about by such lively and hitherto unfelt sentiments of divine love, that it is impossible it should take place without operating powerfully on the mind. Were the penitent of a cold, phlegmatic, callous disposition, the case, perhaps, would be otherwise: but this is not your disposition. Your hearts are naturally tender and easily affected. In the ardour with which you have followed after earthly objects, you have shown the sensibility of your nature, and have sufficiently proved what your minds are capable of. You even boast of the goodness and benevolence of your disposition. And is it possible that your hearts should be then only void of feeling, when God challenges your affections? Is it possible that sorrow for sin should be the only sorrow that can make no impression on your minds? This is an illusion, my beloved friends. If men are not as much in earnest in the great duty of repentance as they usually are in the pursuit of their pleasures, the reason is, that they are sincere libertines, but that they are by no means sincere penitents.

True contrition, therefore, consists not merely in the dread of the torments of hell, or in ineffectual resolutions of amendment; but it consists principally and essentially in a true and

sincere grief of heart for having offended so great, so good, so amiable a God. It takes its rise, not in the love of themselves, but in the pure love of God above all things. This love necessarily induces the penitent to take proper measures to avoid a repetition of the same offences: and these measures are not confined within any given time. It obliges the penitent to renounce the world, at least in affection, and all pleasures and pastimes from which God is excluded. It obliges him to pluck out an eye, and cut off a limb; or, in other words, to make the most painful sacrifices when his eternal interests require them. This is true contrition.

What opinion, then, must we form of those penitents who are only solicitous to avoid sin for a few days previous to their confession; whose only interior monitor is the catalogue of sins in their prayer-books; whose only sentiments of contrition are those transient affections which are excited by the perusal of the preparatory prayers; who confess their sins only by halves; who make some faint resolutions of amendment, keep them for a few days, and then relapse into their former disorders? These false penitents receive not the sacrament. Their sins are still imputed to them, with the addition of the enormous crime of sacrilege. What a state is this, my beloved! How hopeless is their salvation! And yet nothing is more common: the number of true penitents is very small. Many are called to the sacrament of penance, but few partake of its fruits.

Enter, therefore, seriously into yourselves. Now it is that the Church in a particular manner solicits the Lord to shower down his mercies on the most abandoned sinners. Let each one interrogate his own heart. Let him inquire what have been his principal pursuits, and what the general tenor of his conduct through life. Perhaps he will find that his present failings are but a continuation of the follies of his youth; that they have increased with his years; that he is at present precisely what he appeared to be almost at the first dawn of reason—voluptuous, passionate, and tepid. Yes; we have passed through the different stages of life, but our passions have attended us through them all. Our lives have been one continued series of transgressions, diversified only by circumstances and change of situation. "One day hath instructed the next, and one night hath uttered knowledge to the ensuing."—*Ps.*, xviii, 3. The buds of our passions appeared in our childhood, and our riper years were defiled with the same produce of corruption which embitters our palate at the present moment.

And yet, my God! thy avenging arm has not been

stretched upon me. From the throne of thy justice thou didst witness my abominations, and thou hast spared me in preference to thousands. Ah! why hast thou prolonged my days to this hour in the midst of such wickedness? Thou hast undoubtedly mercies in store for me. Thou wouldst not have preserved me from the dangers which have so often threatened my life, wert thou not desirous of showing forth the riches of thy grace in my repentance.

Great God! I begin to detest my evil ways sincerely. Finish the work, and cause me to love the remedy. The state of my conscience fills me with alarm; the corruptions and the disorders of my life overwhelm me with confusion; the remorse occasioned by my crimes embitters all my days. Finish, O God! thy work. Break asunder the chains of my captivity. Subdue my rebellious will. Support my weakness in a conflict which has so often proved superior to my strength. Depart not from me, and grant that I may never regain the tranquillity and peace which I have lost until I am firmly resolved to be thy faithful servant for ever.

XXV.—PALM SUNDAY.

ON COMMUNION.

"Tell ye the daughters of Sion, behold thy King cometh."—*Matt.*, xxi, 5.

The oracles of the prophets, the manifestations of the Lord to the patriarchs, the sacrifices and oblations of the law, together with its mysterious signs and figures, announced to the unfaithful Jerusalem, during the space of several ages, that her Deliverer and her King would visit her in the fulness of time, and be seen in the midst of his people. At length the Precursor appeared, and by the command of God announced his arrival. These happy tidings, so far from being the subject of universal joy to this ungrateful city, occasioned a general uneasiness and alarm. At the triumphal entry of the Son of David, the whole city was in commotion; the priests and pharisees were agitated by fear, jealousy, and rage; only a few simple and pious souls went forth to meet him, and formed a harmless triumph by their acclamations of joy, and by the palm branches which they strewed before him to adorn his entrance.

In the same manner is the Lord received by Christians at the present time. From the beginning of this holy season

the Church has incessantly admonished you that the King of Glory would come, and be himself your passover. On this day, in order to inflame your ardour, she announces that he is near at hand: "Tell ye the daughters of Sion, behold thy King cometh." But, my beloved, what are the impressions which these happy tidings create in your souls? Are they impressions of fear and sadness? Are you sorrowful at the thought of your Easter duty? These, at least, are the impressions which are made on the generality of Christians. A few pious souls only will welcome him with salutations of gladness and love. The law, however, is obligatory on all. Every one is summoned and commanded to go forth and meet him; and, probably, not an individual in this assembly will refuse to obey. What therefore are your dispositions? This is a question of the utmost importance; for on them depends the worthy reception, or the profanation, of the most tremendous mysteries of the Deity. This, I say, is a question of the utmost importance; and I entreat you, as you value your salvation, not only to favour me with your attention, but to endeavour with the utmost solicitude to acquire the dispositions for a worthy communion, which will be displayed before you in this discourse.

"Let a man prove himself," says the apostle, "and so let him eat of that bread."—1 *Cor.*, xi, 28; or, in other words, let a man prove himself, and examine, first, whether he be truly converted from the error of his ways; secondly, whether he has reduced his passions into subjection, and commenced a course of penitential atonement; thirdly, whether he be animated with an ardent and sincere desire of being united to Jesus Christ in the holy communion. This is the triple proof, by which alone the Christian can certify whether he be properly disposed to receive his Lord at the approaching solemnity.

1. In the first place, therefore, my beloved brethren, have you given proof that you are truly and sincerely determined to forsake the ways of iniquity? This is an indispensable point. If you are not thus disposed, you still continue in the shades of sin and death, and consequently the table of the Lord is forbidden you—for the holy communion is the bread of life; the soul must be alive in the sight of God in order to be capacitated to receive it; it is the table of the children of God—his enemies are strictly charged not to approach it; it is the precious pearl mentioned in the gospel—it must not be cast before the unclean. Question yourselves, my beloved, on this subject. Examine the state of your souls. Have you removed every defilement of sin? Are you truly peni-

tent and contrite? Is it probable that your reformation will be permanent and complete?

In order to proceed regularly in this investigation, let us enter into particulars. I will suppose that you have scrutinized the affections of your hearts in their inmost recesses, and that you have made an entire confession of all your sins: but have you reduced your passions into order—have you renounced your criminal habits? I will suppose that you were regularly absolved by your director; but was the absolution ratified in Heaven? Were you truly justified? With what sentiments were you animated? Did you feel the fervour of compunction and sorrow? Were you sincerely desirous of atoning for the past? Did you form real and effective resolutions to begin a new life? Had you determined on proper expedients for breaking off your criminal engagements, and removing yourselves from the occasions of sin? Had you planned in your mind the duties, the occupations, the connections, the whole detail of the moral conduct which ought to be embraced in order to insure your perseverance? These are the cares, these are the solicitudes, which, for a length of time beforehand, engross the whole attention of the man who is sincerely resolved on a change of life. By this you may know whether the conclusion of your dissipated life is at hand, and whether our Lord, when he enters the house of our souls, will address you, as he formerly addressed Zaccheus, with these words: "This day salvation is come to this house."—*Luke*, xix, 9.

But is this the description of your state? Ah! perhaps there is reason to apprehend that your disorders maintained their influence in your souls to the very day of your repentance; that hardly any interval existed between your iniquities and the confession of them; that, after communion, you will return to your former ways; that you will take no greater precautions against sin than you did before; that your illicit connections will continue; and that your tepidity, your spirit of detraction and immortification, will be as prevalent as ever. This is what too many have always hitherto experienced after the paschal solemnity. And if you have experienced the same, can you suppose that you succeeded, and succeeded so repeatedly, in perfecting the work of justification, during that short period which intervened between your former crimes and your relapses, and that you approached to the altar with that penitent heart, that purity of soul, which is required for a worthy participation of the Lamb?

No! my beloved friends, whoever you may be: instead of eating the bread of life, you ate and drank your own

condemnation. Good God! can any rational Christian entertain the idea, even for an instant, that these certain and immediate returns to the vomit, this incongruous mixture of sacred and profane, do not disqualify the soul for the reception of the tremendous mysteries? It is not my intention to insinuate that the worthy participation of the Eucharist invariably establishes the soul in a permanent state of justice: this privilege belongs not to the inhabitants of the earth, but to the pure spirits in the Heavenly Jerusalem. The life of man is a continual temptation; the most holy are not free from danger; no one stands so firm, but he has reason to tremble lest he fall. But I mean to say, that it is absolutely required that, after the remedy of penance, you should not appear infected with the same disorders; and that your cure should be, if not entirely, at least almost complete. I mean to say, with St. Chrysostom, that it is absolutely required, that when you leave the altar, you should resist with a firmer resolution the allurements of flesh and blood; that you should avoid with greater care the occasions of sin; and that the blood of the covenant should infuse into your hearts and souls the sentiments and the inclinations of Jesus: in a word, that your communion should not be the business only of a day.

"He who eateth my flesh," says our Saviour, "abideth in me, and I in him."—*John*, vi, 57. He does not say, he *uniteth* himself to me, but *he abideth in me;* and in the same manner, he does not say, *I unite* myself to him, but *I abide in him:* as much as to say, I form in his heart a fixed, solid, and permanent abode; I make with him a firm and constant alliance. Whence St. Augustine concludes, that the Christian who receives Jesus Christ, and, instead of abiding in him, quickly expels him from his heart by sin, has not spiritually, that is worthily, received his Lord, but has eaten and drunk his own condemnation.

A worthy communion, my beloved brethren, enriches the heart with so many graces, unites it to Jesus in a manner so intimate and ineffable, invigorates it with such strength and courage, that the soul is enabled to advance for a length of time in the paths of salvation, and is, in some degree, rendered incapable of frustrating in an instant the good effects produced by the most powerful remedy of religion, and of falling back immediately into the most shameful weaknesses that can disgrace a Christian.

Look, therefore, into the state of your souls, and ascertain whether your communions have been profanations or not. The process is easy: you have only to examine their fruits.

What change did they operate in your interior? What was your subsequent mode of life? Holy and profitable communions are never received by the man whose morals are uniformly worldly and profane. As long, therefore, as you continued to indulge the same passions, and to adhere to the same criminal engagements; as long as you were addicted to the same failings after communion as you were before, so long you have too much reason to fear that you were deficient in your preparation, and that your communions were sacrilegious in the sight of God.

2. From this short view of the subject, you will be convinced that confession is not the only proof of a reform of life which the law requires. The minister who rashly absolves habitual sinners, exceeds his commission; for his delegated powers extend only over the truly contrite: his sentence will not be ratified in Heaven; or rather, his sentence will be reversed, and your condemnation will be pronounced in Heaven, instead of your pardon: the blood of the Lamb, which he pours on your head, will cry to Heaven for vengeance; you will receive the stroke of death from the hand that was stretched out to save you from destruction. The pastor, therefore, is authorised and required to exact proofs of the sincerity of your protestations (if your protestations have hitherto been without effect), before he admits you to the sacraments, and to certify whether you have renounced the occasions of sin, whether you are for ever divorced from the objects of your passions, and whether you have commenced the course of penitential atonement for your former offences.

According to the ancient discipline of the Church, the notorious sinner was not allowed to receive the holy communion unless he had devoted whole years to the painful works of humiliation, fasting, and prayer: the Eucharist was the bread of life, which the sinner ate, as it were, in the sweat of his brow. And can you suppose, that, because the Church has consented, for prudential reasons, to the abolition of this point of discipline, can you suppose that to confess your inveterate crimes is to atone for them, and that the purity of soul which is required in the worthy communicant, is attained by the bare exposure of the malignity and infection of his spiritual sores? Ah! my friends, the law of God can never be abrogated by custom: the Church, indeed, may dispense with public proofs, but she will not, she cannot, dispense with private proofs from the sinners of whom I speak: primitive fervour may abate; but the sanctity of the Lord is the same, and the sanctity of the receiver must be the same.

The Church appointed that the forty days of Lent should precede the paschal communion, on purpose that time and opportunity might be given to habitual sinners to weep over ther offences, to purify their souls by prayer and fasting, and thus to dispose themselves for a worthy participation of the holy mysteries. By this she indicates, that the necessity still exists of devoting some time to penance after a sinful life, before we presume to sit down to the banquet of our Lord.

There may, indeed, be exceptions to this rule. It may be sometimes expedient, on account of the lively compunction, the wonderful conversion of a sinner, or even necessary on account of the danger which would attend delay, when the penitent who is sincerely converted is of a fickle and inconstant disposition, to abridge the time of trial. The laws of the Church are replete with wisdom, charity, and prudence. The salvation of sinners is her only object: and the means which conduce more immediately to that end are the most conformable to her spirit. But this does not operate against the general rule, namely, that sinners should do penance, and that they should prove themselves before they eat of this bread.

You, perhaps, may say, that the law of the Church requires that you communicate within a given time, and that you cannot defer it in order to give proofs of your sincerity. What! do you insinuate by this, that the Church commands you to communicate unworthily; and that she considers a sacrilegious communion as the full accomplishment of the paschal duty? You would, indeed, by such a communion avoid her censures, because her cognizance extends only to exterior appearances, but you would not avoid the anathemas of Heaven, which would witness your profanation. She commands you to receive at this time, on the supposition that you will approach the altar with a pure conscience; on the supposition that you have employed this time of Lent in doing penance for your sins, and in making the necessary preparation for a worthy communion. But, if these preparations have been neglected, she commands that your communion be deferred, and has empowered her ministers to extend the term of the paschal law to a more distant period. The fruits of the sacrament, and the accomplishment of her precept, are not confined to times and seasons, but depend on the innocence and purity of the receiver.

3. If, indeed, you were animated with a supereminent degree of compunction, and with a sincere and ardent desire of being united to your Lord, no delay would be necessary,

as I have said above. This, your fervent love, which is the third proof required, would excuse your immediate admission to the sacred banquet. But, alas! in what breast does this fervent love reside? The greater part of Christians are uneasy at the approach of this holy time. They loathe the bread of life. These days of joy and gladness to the Church, are to them days of melancholy and sadness. Like the young man in the gospel, whom our Saviour counselled to sell all he had and follow him, they are sorrowful when they hear the solemn proclamation of the Church summoning them to throw off the defiled garments of sin, and to prepare themselves for the nuptials: and were it not for her threats and anathemas, they would willingly renounce the table of the Lord for ever.

Great God! is it necessary, then, to drive thy beloved children into thy embraces! Are their hearts so far estranged from thee, as to be callous to all the attractions of thy infinite love? Could the primitive Christians have believed that the authority of the Church would ever have been exerted for these purposes; and that her threats, which in those times were employed only to deter the rebellious and unworthy from daring to partake of her mysteries, would in after ages have been necessary to prevent her children from entirely forsaking thy holy altar?

Were you animated with the true spirit of Christianity, you would declare that a prohibition from partaking of the body of the Lord, would be the greatest punishment which the Church could inflict: you would declare that life was insupportable without the Blessed Eucharist. Then it would be unnecessary to exhort you to the participation of this sacred food: you would tell me that in religion there was nothing more consolatory, in virtue nothing more desirable or beneficial. You would tell me, that it was the sweetest soother under affliction, the only comfort in your banishment, the daily remedy for your weaknesses, and the universal reliever of all your wants.

But you say that the holy Eucharist requires such perfect dispositions in the receiver. I grant it. But, my Christian brethren, these dispositions are attained by the frequent participation of it. By its means alone you will be enabled to resist your spiritual enemies, to subdue your passions, and to live a holy life. By its means alone will you be enabled to receive it worthily. One communion ought to be a preparation for the next. The farther you remove yourselves from the holy table, the more will your tepidity increase, the greater strength will your passions acquire, and the more will both the reign of Jesus be weakened in your hearts, and

the man of sin be established and fortified. Be not deterred therefore, by a plea which is not the offspring of humility, but the child of sloth. Fly to the altar on the wings of love. Open your hearts to the sweet attractions of your Jesus; invite him to take full possession of them, and to make them his abode for ever.

Pour forth your souls before him, and say with St. Augustine: Lord! who will give me, that I may be for ever united to thee; that thou alone mayest possess my affections, and reign without a rival in my soul? Ah! perhaps, Lord, my inward house is not sufficiently adorned for thy reception; but do thou come, thy presence alone will embellish it. Perhaps thy secret and invisible enemies are not entirely dislodged; but art thou not stronger than the strongest in armour? Thy presence alone will expel them: all will be in peace when thou hast taken possession of my heart. Perhaps my soul is as yet defiled with spots and stains, which disfigure her in thy sight: but thy sacred blood will remove any defilement, and thou wilt renew my youth and my beauty, like that of the eagle. Only come, Lord, and delay not. With thee I shall possess all things; but without thee, I shall possess nothing, although surrounded by all the pleasures and favours which the world can bestow.

Are these, my beloved friends, the holy sentiments of eagerness and impatience which lead the greater number of you to the table of the Lord? Ah! if the Church left you at full liberty to communicate or not, the table of the Lord would be abandoned at this holy time; very small indeed would be the number of true disciples, who, with repentance and love, would keep the pasch with their Divine Master.

"My soul hateth your new moons and your solemnities," says the Lord, by the mouth of his prophet; "they are become troublesome to me, I am weary of bearing them."—*Isa.*, i, 14. You behold all the people hastening to the foot of my altar, and partaking of the sacred offerings during the days of this solemn festival. You suppose that the only motive that actuates them is, the sanctification of my name; that I am pleased with their incense and sacrifices; and that these extraordinary acts of homage will induce me to forget their iniquities: but you are deceived. They are a perverse race; they have put no difference between what is impure and what is holy; and so far from being glorified, "I was profaned in the midst of them."—*Ezek.*, xxii, 26. Adulterers, fornicators, the slaves of hatred, animosity, revenge, rapine, and calumny, appear with confidence in the holy place. The hands which you behold extended towards my throne are filled with

abominations; and their sacrifices pollute the sanctity of my eyes, when I look down upon them.

Be on your guard, my beloved brethren, and profit by the experience of others. Prove yourselves before you presume to appear before the altar of God. Be animated with the pure sentiments of compunction and love. Put on the new man, and take precautions that Jesus Christ enter not your souls in vain. Preserve the holy treasure after you have received it; and guard it, I do admonish you, carefully against the enemies of your salvation, who will then redouble their efforts to wrest it from you. Make yourselves worthy to become the temple and the abode of God, who is about to incorporate himself with you; and do not fill up the measure of your iniquities, in a place where you may find a plentiful source of grace and a pledge of immortality.

XXVI.—GOOD FRIDAY.

ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

"It is consummated."—*John*, xix, 30.

These were the memorable words of our blessed Saviour, when he consummated the great sacrifice of man's redemption on the cross; these the last breathings of his pious soul before its temporary separation from the body; this his last declaration to his faithful followers.

How these words were understood by those who surrounded him at the moment, is not said; but the melancholy reflections which overwhelmed the minds of his apostles, when they understood that He, whom they trusted as their great Deliverer, was no longer to be sought for among the living, must have been painful indeed. Perhaps the dreadful prodigies which succeeded—the preternatural eclipse of the sun, —the trembling of the earth,—the resurrection of the dead, —and the confusion of all nature, encouraged the idea that the universal dissolution was at hand,—that the world could not survive the death of its Maker,—and that the outrage offered to his divine person could not be expiated by any thing less than the destruction of all creation. This, perhaps, was confirmed by the recollection of his former words respecting the near approach of the last day, and of the final consummation of all.

But the testimony of faith has declared, that on that great day of retribution, the Son of Man, instead of appearing in

the garb of humility, loaded with ignominy, and nailed to the cross, will be seated on a cloud of glory, surrounded by legions of angels, and preceded by the ensigns of power, terror, and majesty. Let us, therefore, examine the mysterious import of these last words: they are instructive, and explain the whole mystery of the cross.

In the first place, our Lord frequently declared, by the ministry of his prophets, that the Jewish sacrifices were imperfect; that they suspended his judgments, but did not satisfy his justice; and that they were accepted merely because they prefigured the great sacrifice of his son, by which every deficiency was to be filled up. His death, therefore, consummates the measure of atonement which was due to the divine justice.

In the second place, Jerusalem had not filled up the number of her crimes. She had as yet only put to death the envoys and prophets that were sent to her: it remained that she should put to death the Son and Heir likewise, in order that the measure of the iniquity of her ungrateful children might be consummated.

Lastly, testimonies of an infinite love had not been given to God in return for that infinite love which he entertains for man. Such testimonies could not be given by any created being: for this reason, he himself descended from Heaven, and by the voluntary sacrifice of his life gave testimonies of love equal to that of his Father.

By these words, therefore, Jesus intimates that he has consummated the satisfaction due to the justice of his Father; that man has consummated his ingratitude; and that he has consummated his love. The contemplation of these mysteries will open an extensive field for pious reflections, and will display before our eyes truths which are concealed from the world, because the world is a stranger to the mystery of the cross.

1. God would neither be wise, nor holy, nor just, nor even good, says St. Augustine, were he to suffer sin to go unpunished. His *glory* requires that he should vindicate his injured honour. His *wisdom* requires that he should reëstablish order, which had been violated by sin. His *goodness* requires that, by due punishment, he should stem the torrent of wickedness, which would be extended beyond all limits of impunity. His *sanctity* requires that he should no longer communicate himself to the unworthy, but abandon them to wretchedness and wo. In a word, every attribute of the Divinity demands the punishment of sin.

But God's justice, which in a particular manner calls for

the punishment of the sinner, could not be satisfied by any atonement that the sinner could offer; the victim was not worthy of him; man could offend him, but his powers were not adequate to repair the offence. It was necessary that a more noble victim should be substituted; that the heavens should open, and rain down the Just One—the Lord and Saviour; that He who alone could restore to the Deity the honour of which he had been deprived by the revolt of the sinner, should humble himself and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross. This was the great design of the wisdom and goodness of God in the sacrifice which is offered up by his only Son on this day for the redemption of the world.

The evils which sin had occasioned were manifold. It had corrupted the mind of man, and caused it to love those things which were forbidden: it had corrupted the heart, and caused it to rebel against the law, and refuse admission to the will of its maker: it had corrupted the senses, and enabled them to subject to their commands that reason to which they ought to have been subjected. These were the evils occasioned by sin; and these evils are remedied and expiated by our divine Saviour in the Garden of Olives the night preceding his passion. The exposition of the history of this great event will display these points in the clearest light.

In the first place, the sufferings of mind which our Saviour endured in this first stage of his passion, are proportionate to the evil which sin had caused in the mind of man. The hour being come when our Lord was to leave this world and return to the Father, after having imparted to his disciples the last testimony of his love in the institution of the Christian Passover, he goes forth attended by his disciples: like a victim, he advances cheerfully and voluntarily to the place of sacrifice. He goes into the Garden of Olives, there to offer himself for the last time to all the wills of his Heavenly Father. His disciples are too weak to witness his sufferings on this occasion; he therefore retires to a small distance, and prostrating himself on the ground, receives from the hands of his Father the bitter chalice of his passion.

No sooner is the bloody ministry of our reconciliation accepted of by him, than he is treated by the justice of his Father as the victim of sin—the holocaust of expiation, loaded with the iniquities of the whole world. His pure soul instantly feels the weight of the wrath of God. He beholds the monster sin in all its horrors—in all its malice and deformity: he beholds its dismal effects, death, and perdition, and ignorance, and pride, and the universal corruption of the world:

he beholds the sins of all mankind—the infidelities of the Jews, and the abominations of the Gentiles—the sins of former times, and the sins of latter times: he beholds the heresies, schisms, and dissensions, which were to tear thousands from his embraces: he beholds the profanations of his altars, the sacrilegious abuses of his sacraments, the almost universal extinction of faith and charity: and, in short, every crime which would be committed by his chosen people, the members of his mystical body, and the dearest objects of his love.

What a spectacle, my beloved, is this! Who can express or conceive the tortures which he endures on this occasion! With what horror and detestation does he cast his eyes over this enormous heap of abominations! He cannot endure the sight; he is overpowered; he is sorrowful even unto death. Willingly would he turn away his eyes; but the inexorable justice of his Father will not consent: he must behold it: he must contemplate it. What a trial was this to him who was meek and humble of heart—to him who was purity and innocence itself.

Pause a moment, my brethren, and behold the effects which are caused by the undisguised exposure of the guilt of sin in the mind of your agonising Jesus. You are summoned at this time to take a view of your own transgressions, and to bewail them in the presence of your offended Maker. Fix your eyes therefore on Jesus: he exhibits in his agony a perfect model of repentance. He is sorrowful even unto death: he falls prostrate on the ground: he cannot endure the sight of sin: the excess of his agony forces from his body drops as it were of blood. It is not, indeed, expected that the same effects should be produced in your minds; but it is required that you should be troubled at the sight of sin—that you should view it in the light of faith—that you should hate it above all other evils—and that you should be determined to submit to sufferings and privations of every kind rather than incur its odious guilt any more.

In addition to these sufferings of mind, our Lord is subjected to humiliations, in order to remedy the second evil occasioned by sin—namely, the corruption of the heart, and its opposition to the will and law of God. He is humbled in the first place before his disciples. His constancy seems to forsake him at the sight of death; he who had so frequently encouraged them to suffer with resolution and patience, is constrained to acknowledge before them his own fears and alarms; he even implores their aid, and conjures them not to forsake him in the midst of his anguish. Thus is our Lord

not only loaded with the weight of our sins, but obliged to endure the confusion and shame attendant on guilt.

He is humbled in the second place by being necessitated to accept of the consolatory assistance of an angel. So totally were the powers of his body exhausted, and such deep impressions had the terrors of death made on his mind, that an angel was sent from Heaven to comfort, to strengthen, and assist him. He, who a short time before was honoured and adored by the whole Heavenly court, is now, as it were, placed below the rank of his own creatures: he who upholds the universe is not able to uphold himself: his strength is gone, and he falls pale, trembling, and convulsed, into the arms of one who received his being and strength from him.

He is humbled again by the unfriendly indifference of his disciples. His sufferings do not seem to make any impression on their feelings: while he is struggling almost in the agonies of death, they fall asleep; he is obliged even to reprove them for their drowsiness and sloth: "What! cannot you watch one hour with me?" He suffers alone: every one, even his dear disciples, seem to declare against him, and take part with the justice of his Father. How nice are we, my beloved, respecting the behaviour of our friends!—the least coolness on their parts, the least want of attention, is severely felt by us. Let us learn from the sufferings of Jesus to expect nothing from creatures, and not to complain if our benefits are repaid with nothing but ingratitude.

These are the humiliations of our Saviour in his agony: but the third evil of sin—namely, the evil of sensuality—is still to be expiated, and therefore the excruciating torture of mind which is occasioned by the foresight of his approaching passion, is added to the number of his sufferings in the garden. Ah! my beloved, the foresight of an impending and inevitable punishment is frequently more painful than the punishment itself. Our blessed Jesus experienced it. At this moment the clear and distinct view of every stage of his passion is expanded before him; every stripe, every affront, every pang which he is to endure afterwards in rotation, rush suddenly on his mind: he endures all at once. Oh! the torture is too great: his soul is overpowered: he entreats his Father "that the chalice might pass from him:" he recals his prayer—"not my will but thine be done:" he falls into an agony, and drops of blood issue forth from every pore.

So inexorably, my beloved, does a God who is infinitely good, chastise his beloved Son on account of our sins. What an inducement is here for us to commence with cheerfulness, and without delay, the arduous work of repentance, and to

devote the remainder of our lives to the great duty of expiating the crimes which we have already committed! But, alas! how many are there who, instead of being excited to commence a life of penance, make the sufferings of our Saviour the pretext for leading a life of indolence and pleasure—who say, that as their ransom is now paid, works of penance are neither requisite nor meritorious. O my blessed Jesus! thou, therefore, hast been a man of sorrows, only that we might be men of pleasure! No: Christian brethren, this cannot be said. Jesus has suffered *for* us, but not to exempt us from suffering. He has suffered in order that our sufferings might be available to salvation. By sacrificing his life he has disposed the justice of God to accept our weak sacrifice of penance. His sufferings have stamped a value on ours, and made them acceptable to the Deity.

2. Thus did the Lamb of God endure the disquietude, the humiliations, and the chastisements due to sin: thus was the justice of his Father consummated. We will proceed in the painful narration, and describe the consummation of ingratitude and malignity on the part of man. There are many points for our consideration; namely, the weakness or perfidy of his disciples, the iniquity of the priests and ancients, the inconstancy of the people, the timidity of Pilate, and the inhumanity of his executioners; in all of which you will discover that ingratitude and malice were extended to the utmost limits of possibility.

The first subject for our consideration is, the weakness or perfidy of his disciples, by one of whom he is betrayed, and by the others abandoned. No sooner is our Lord recovered from his agony, than behold "Judas, one of the twelve, comes into the garden, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and ancients of the people."—*Matt.*, xxvi, 27. Ah! who could have conceived it possible that a disciple of Jesus—an apostle—an intimate companion—a bosom friend—a witness of his innocence, sanctity, and miracles, and admitted to the sacred banquet of his last supper, would appear at the head of his executioners, and form the plan for his destruction! What a pang was felt by our blessed Lord on this occasion! But pause a moment, and reflect on the treachery of this perfidious disciple. He does not openly avow his intention, by seizing at once on the person of his Master; he conceals his malicious design under the garb of friendship; he gives him a kiss—a kiss more piercing, says St. Leo, to the tender heart of Jesus, than the spear which pierced his side. But in what manner is his salutation received? "Friend," says Jesus, "for what

art thou come?" As if he said: notwithstanding thy perfidy, I will still speak to thee as a friend: there is yet time for repentance: I am willing to pardon thee. O words of clemency and love! What heart could have withstood their power? What breast could have refrained from heaving with sighs of confusion and love? Who would not have thrown himself at the feet of this innocent Lamb of God, and with floods of tears implored the forgiveness of his crime?

And yet, how many imitators of his example will there be during this time of Easter? How many will present themselves at this banquet with hearts devoted to the world, and enslaved to sin! How many will give him the kiss of peace at his holy table, through no other motive than because they are driven to it by the severe threats of the Church! How many will there be to whom our Lord will address the reproof which he addressed to Judas: "Perfidious wretches! *will you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?* Will you repay my benefits with ingratitude, and dare to insult me by the means of that very sacrament, which is in a peculiar manner the pledge of my love towards you?"

Now is the Saviour of the world delivered into the hands of sinners; and here begins the public history of his sufferings. He is immediately seized, bound, and dragged away like a malefactor. Peter prepares to defend him; but our Lord commands him to desist, and by this prohibition informs us that the arms which he bequeaths to his Church are spiritual arms—the arms of patience, prayer, and sanctity: that his doctrine is to be extended and upheld by charity, meekness, and humility; and that the sword which he places in her hands, is intended for the destruction of sin, but not of the sinner. Thus we see that Peter's interference was of short duration. An indiscreet zeal, guided by passion, is never of long continuance. He begins to follow his Master at a distance: a sure presage of a speedy fall. The man who follows Jesus at a distance, will not follow him long. This the unhappy Peter experiences. A simple question makes him a perjurer and an apostate. He thrice denies that he is an apostle of Jesus, even in the presence of Jesus himself. Good God! what a fall! Peter—the chief pastor—the pillar of the Church—the apostle of the circumcision, even Peter denies his Lord!

Jesus, however, does not exclude him for ever from his love. Although surrounded by relentless enemies, and deafened by the clamours of the multitude, and the vociferations of those who demand his death, he casts an eye of pity on his

unfaithful disciple, and by the interior workings of his grace sends him forth from the wicked company into which he had imprudently entered, to efface his guilt in private by the tears of sincere repentance.

We, my brethren, have been frequently made partakers of the same graces. The Lord has repeatedly exposed before our eyes the enormities of our sins, and secretly invited us to go forth from the company of our passions and vices, and weep over the infidelities of which we have been guilty. But have we hitherto duly corresponded with these graces? Have we not rather turned our backs upon him, and renewed our treason almost immediately after we had effected our reconciliation with him? Oh! let us tremble, lest, instead of extending the same mercy to us again, he should forsake us, as he did Judas, and leave us, like him, to die in our sins.

"Judas," says the gospel, "seeing that Jesus was condemned, repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver,.....and in despair went and hanged himself with a halter." This was a convincing proof of our Lord's innocence, and ought to have weighed powerfully on the minds of his accusers. But we are now to witness the consummation of iniquity in the priests and doctors of the law. This convincing proof makes no impression on them. They witness the repentance, they witness the despair of a man, who could not possibly be induced to acknowledge his guilt by any other consideration than the force of truth; and yet their only reply is: "Look thou to it." They had before heard the doctrine of Jesus, and witnessed his miracles: they had seen prodigies and wonders wrought by him, which had never been wrought before: and now they behold Judas repentant, despairing, and dying; and yet they are not moved. So true it is, that the continual abuse of the graces of God brings on that hardness of heart, which too frequently leads to final impenitence.

Be upon your guard, my brethren. You are as yet strangers to this hardness of heart. You cannot witness the sudden death of a sinner; you cannot hearken to the severe truths of the gospel; you cannot behold an extraordinary conversion, without being sensibly affected. But although your hearts are not hardened at the present moment, is there not reason to fear that they will be hardened at no very distant period? Have none of you so far stifled the remorse of conscience—are none of you so indifferent to the danger of death, as to live on for a considerable time in the state of sin? Do none of you perform your duties to God with a kind of disgust? and are none of you disposed to omit the most

essential obligations of religion on the most trifling excuses? I hope there are none. But if there are, truth requires me to declare that they are hastening to that dreadful state of obduracy, which we so much reprobate in the Jewish priests.

In the second place, the high priest, astonished at the silence of Jesus under all the accusations brought against him, and perhaps discovering something more than human in the patience, meekness, and dignity of his deportment, at length exclaims: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." But, in proposing this question, he is not influenced by the love of truth; his only desire is to ensnare our Saviour in his speech, to draw a full confession from his own mouth, in order that he might destroy him according to the forms of law.

Our Lord, nevertheless, out of respect to his Father's name, and to give us to understand that we are not to be deterred from giving testimony to the truth by the passions and prejudices of men, however serious may be the consequences, nor to wait till people are prepared to profit by it, openly proclaims that he is the Christ foretold by the prophets, and that they should hereafter see him sitting at the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of Heaven.

This solemn confession, so far from mitigating the fury of his judge, contributes to hasten the sentence of his condemnation. The high priest rends his garments, and exclaims, "Blasphemy;" and they all declare him worthy of death. Not a single friend speaks in his behalf.

With what submission, my divine Jesus, dost thou bow down to this iniquitous sentence! Thou dost not complain of injustice: thou knowest that it is the will of thy Father, and therefore thou receivest it in silence, like a lamb destined for the slaughter.

From this example of our Saviour, let us learn to submit without complaint to the injuries we receive from our fellow-creatures. They whom we call our enemies, are the ministers of God's justice upon us, and as it were, the channels through which the choicest gifts of Heaven are conveyed to our souls. Let us not, therefore, harbour any resentment against the hand that strikes, nor against the tongue that calumniates us; but let us fix our eyes solely on the wise and merciful designs of Providence, which by the means of these men is promoting our salvation.

But let us proceed, and we shall behold the consummation of the malice of man in the inconstancy of the multitude, who with loud cries insist on his immediate execution. Jesus,

after having been exposed to the barbarity and brutal insolence of the servants and ministers of the high priest during the whole night, abandoned by his disciples, and looking forward to the completion of the horrid tragedy at the return of day, is now hurried from the house of Caiphas to the pretorium of Pilate, through the streets of ungrateful Jerusalem, followed by a lawless mob with shouts and cries, insulted by all, and defended by none. Oh! what a change is here! A few days ago we beheld him triumphantly entering into Jerusalem, like a conqueror taking possession of his kingdom, amidst the acclamations of the multitude; to-day he is execrated by this same multitude, and loaded with every species of ignominy and reproach. So inexorable is the justice of his Father, and so fickle and inconstant is the world.

But, behold the extremes; and first, the injustice into which these infatuated men are hurried by their blindness. Pilate, in compliance with the ancient annual custom of releasing to them a criminal at the time of the Passover, proposes for their choice, Jesus on the one hand, and Barabbas, a notorious malefactor, on the other. What a parallel! The Saviour of the world placed on a level with a thief and a murderer! And yet Barabbas is preferred, and preferred by universal acclamation—by the priests, the elders, the doctors, the multitude, before the tribunal of a heathen judge, and in the presence of the whole nation of the Jews assembled at Jerusalem on account of the Passover!

Ah! my beloved, we are shocked at the inconstancy and wickedness of this stiff-necked race! But let us look into ourselves, and perhaps we shall discover that our iniquity far surpasses that of the Jews, and that we have preferred before him something more despicable than Barabbas—even our own passions and self-will, his most odious enemies. If we discover that this crime is imputable to us, let us fix our eyes on the meekness of the Lamb of God under this unmerited humiliation, and let us submit with the same evenness of temper to the humiliations which we may receive from our fellow-creatures. They will not come undeserved.

Secondly, behold the fury and madness of these infatuated Jews. Pilate, a heathen magistrate, refuses to proceed further in the business; he washes his hands in the presence of them all, and declares that he is innocent of the blood of that Just Man. But the Jews exclaim with great vehemence: "Let his blood be upon us, and upon our children."—*Matt.*, xxvii, 25. The event has demonstrated that their petition was granted. They are to this day the outcasts of the universe, vagabonds, and fugitives, without altar, without

sacrifice. They bear on their foreheads the marks of the innocent blood which their forefathers so unjustly spilled, and of the curse which this horrid deed of theirs has ever since entailed upon them.

Thus we see it is in the power of parents, and it is much too often their crime and their misfortune, to entail the most dreadful maledictions on their families and their posterity. God visiteth the iniquities of parents on their children even to the third and fourth generation; and to no other cause than this may be attributed the total extinction of many families, which have been swept off as it were by an invisible hand, from the face of the earth, without so much as a single vestige of them remaining.

Thirdly, behold the ingratitude of his persecutors. These same men, who a short time before had received so many benefits from our Lord as to form the resolution of making him their King, now declare that they "have no king but Cæsar."—*John*, xix, 15. They reject the Son of David, whose reign was to be eternal, and they "will not that he reign over them."—*Luke*, xix, 14.

Perhaps, my beloved, it may be found on examination that we have frequently imitated the ingratitude of the Jews. In our fits of devotion, when we presented ourselves at the holy table, we invited Jesus to come and be the King of our hearts: "Come, my dear Jesus," we said, "take full possession of my heart, and make it for ever a servant of thy love." These were our words, and probably our desires, when we prepared ourselves for this act of religion. But how long did we continue in the same sentiments? Did we not, like too many others, turn our backs upon him almost immediately after we had partaken of his blessings, and declare, if not by words, at least by our actions, "that we would not have this man reign over us, and that we would have no king but Cæsar,"—that is, our pleasures and passions?

But let us proceed, and you will behold the malignity of man consummated in Pilate, who acts in direct opposition to the dictates of his conscience, and condemns the innocent. In the first place, this weak and timid governor acknowledges that he is not capable of forming a judgment on the nature of the accusation brought forward against our Lord; that he is unacquainted with the Jewish law, and that the cause before him seems to require that it should be submitted to the decision of the high priest and Sanhedrim. Nevertheless, the fear of giving offence to the Jews impels him to proceed without authority and without a competent knowledge, and at length to pronounce the fatal sentence. Secondly, the

apprehension of losing the favour of his prince operates more powerfully on his mind, than the dread of committing an act of injustice, and shedding innocent blood. Thirdly, he applies to the enemies of our Lord for information respecting his pretended crimes: and although he is convinced that the tumultuous clamours of a mob are of no weight in a court of judicature, he nevertheless determines to prefer his own interest to the rights of justice, and in his own mind pronounces, that it is better that one man should die, than that the whole people should revolt from the authority of Cæsar under his administration. Fourthly, he interrogates Jesus himself; he is struck with his replies; he publicly declares to the people, that he is guilty of no crime, and yet he does not set him at liberty. Fifthly, terrified by the dreams of his wife, he endeavours to extricate himself by sending our Lord to Herod, under pretence that he is a Galilean, although he had too much reason to suppose that Jesus would not meet with any protectors in the court of that prince, who would be disposed to take up the cause, and procure his discharge. The humiliations and insults to which our Lord was exposed by this unworthy expedient of Pilate, are not to be conceived. But, instead of listening to the scoffs and derisions of that haughty tyrant and his court, let us return with our Lord to the pretorium of Pilate, and behold the consummation of the malignity of men in the cruelty of the soldiers.

Pilate, convinced more and more of the innocence of our Lord, and terrified more and more by the fury of the populace, at length condemns him to the most painful and ignominious punishment of being scourged. Now is he delivered into the hands of the military. Let your reflections accompany my words. I wish not so much to excite your compassion, as to induce you to turn yourselves, and calculate the degree of punishment which your sins have deserved. The bloody executioners seize on their prey, and bind him naked to the pillar. They discharge on his body innumerable lashes. They glut their barbarity with his sacred blood. At length they loose him from the pillar; they throw a purple garment over his shoulders; they put a reed into his hand; they press a crown of sharp thorns on his head; and, having thus arrayed him as a mock king, they kneel down before him in derision. But let us turn away our eyes: let us not behold the inhuman blows which they discharge on his bleeding head, nor the filthy phlegm with which they cover his face—that face, which the angels behold with trembling, and which kings and prophets earnestly desired to see, and could not.

Meanwhile, the inhuman badge of royalty, with which he

is crowned, pierces deep into his sacred head; the blood trickles down his face on every side: his heavenly features are obscured; and his countenance is ghastly beyond description. In this frightful state Pilate exhibits him to the people with these words, "Behold the man." O my beloved! is this the Saviour—the Emmanuel—the Holy One—the Desired of all nations! Do you recognise him with these hideous—these mangled features? Fix your eyes upon him: *behold the man.* Ah! he is divested of all his beauty and comeliness: he is reduced to the lowest degree of infamy and shame: but he is not divested of his divinity. These are sufferings which he endures for your sins. *Behold,* therefore, *the man:* behold the barbarous tragedy, which you renew as often as you consent to sin: behold the sacred body which you defile, as often as you transgress the bounds of duty.

Oh! can you remain unmoved at this spectacle? One would think, says St. Augustine, that human wickedness was extended to its utmost limits by these unhappy wretches who nailed our Lord to the cross; but it is extended still further by Christians, who frustrate the effects of his passion by their sins, because they despise the Lord in his glory, whom the Jews despised only when he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity, and because they crucify their Lord after he had risen to become immortal and impassible.

2. I will not wound your feelings by entering into a description of the excruciating tortures of our Lord during the last stage of his passion; but, as I have described the consummation of the justice of his Father, and of the malice of men, I will now describe the consummation of his love for us in the concluding scene of our redemption.

It is not the perfidy of a false disciple, it is not the envy of the priests, the inconstancy of the people, the timidity of Pilate, nor the cruelty of the executioners, that nails our Lord to the cross; it is his love alone. He delivers himself for us, says the apostle, out of pure love: if he had not loved us, in vain would all the powers of the earth and hell have conspired to take away his life.

"Jesus having loved his own," says the gospel, "he loved them to the end."—*John,* xiii, 1. Like a tender father, his paternal affection increases, the nearer he approaches to the time when he is to be separated from them.

His love is disinterested. He is careful that not one of his disciples shall be involved in his sufferings: he will not allow them to weep over him: and so great is his affection and solicitude even for the ungrateful Jerusalem, that he is

more affected by the foresight of the evils with which that unhappy city is to be visited, than by the dread of the cruel death which he himself is about to suffer. "Daughters of Jerusalem," says he, "weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the day will come, wherein they will say: blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the breasts that have not given suck: for if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"—*Luke*, xxiii, 28.

Attend to the words of your Saviour. He exhibits himself before you on this day with the cross on his mangled shoulders; he describes, by the voice of his ministers, the history of his passion and death, not indeed with a view of exciting your compassion, but in order to induce you to weep over the disordered state of your souls, and to dread the judgments which await impenitence. "Weep not for me," he says to you, "but weep for yourselves, and for your children." I shall triumph over death; but when will you triumph over that inveterate habit which has so long had dominion over you, and prevented your conversion? I shall rise in glory from the grave; but when will you rise from the grave of sin in which you have been buried for so many years? Oh! dread the judgments which hang over your heads: "weep for yourselves, and for your children." I could easily break asunder my bands, and draw all creatures to myself; but when will you dissolve the criminal connections which enslave your hearts?—when will you renounce these favourite passions which age and indulgence have so deeply rooted within you? Oh! "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children; for if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"

His love is generous. He prays even in the agonies of death for the very wretches who are crucifying him. He collects the shattered remains of his strength, in order to excuse their sin, and to solicit their pardon: he raises his voice, and cries out: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—*Luke*, xxiii, 34. He is ready to wash away their guilt with the very blood that they are spilling: and even on the cross which they themselves had erected, he is desirous of effecting their reconciliation with his injured Father. With the example of our Redeemer, praying and dying for his enemies, before our eyes, can we refuse to pardon the injuries which we receive from our brethren and fellow-creatures?

His love is triumphant. He gains a disciple even in his last moments. His languishing and dying eyes are still

capable of piercing the inmost recesses of the soul. Even in his disgrace he can exercise his power, and promise kingdoms. He casts a look of mercy on the thief who is suffering by his side, and says, "this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Happy criminal! Thou reapest the first fruits of his blood. Thou wert not a witness of his miracles; but thou discoverest in his patience evident marks of his divinity. Sinners, you, in the same manner, are fortunate; for this is your day likewise. The mercies of the Lord are at your command. The moment of his expiring is your moment. His last sighs and the first fruits of his passion are intended for you.

Jesus having now finished the great work of our redemption, and consummated all things; having offered his eternal sacrifice, and fulfilled all the ancient figures and prophecies; having established his Church, vindicated the honour of his Father, and concluded his ministry, he declares that *all is consummated:* he then bows down his head, and "crying out with a loud voice: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, he gives up the ghost."—*Luke*, xxiii, 46. Oh! my brethren, let not our attention be diverted, at this solemn moment, by the prodigies that accompany the death of the great Author of nature: a far more interesting subject presents itself before us. Let us contemplate our Jesus, hanging naked and despised on the cross, and requiring from us no other return for all these sufferings, than the return of our love and service. He dies that he might save us; he dies instead of us: he dies in time that we may not die eternally; he dies because he loves us: he dies because we do not love him. Can you, beloved Christians, prescribe any bounds to your sorrow, to your gratitude and love? Alas! to what misery hereafter will you not be justly sentenced, if in this life you do not love our Lord Jesus crucified!

The multitude, which had assembled to behold the crucifixion, cry out: "Let him descend from the cross, and we will believe in him."—*Matt.*, xxvii, 42. But, my brethren, let us address him in words of a different import: let us say; It is because thou art nailed to the cross; it is because thou hast preferred this throne of ignominy, where thou couldst be our high priest and victim, to the throne which thou occupiedst on the right hand of thy Father, that we believe in thee, that we adore thee as our Mediator, and that we will devote the remainder of our lives to thy service. Do not descend from thy cross, where alone thou art our happiness and our hope: rather draw us up to thee as thou hast promised. The greater the indignities and torments which thou endurest, the stronger is our faith, the firmer is our hope, and the more

ardent is our love. Is it possible that such excessive sufferings can be of no avail? Wilt thou consent that those souls should perish, whom thou hast purchased at so dear a rate? No; thou wouldst not have submitted to such a disgraceful death, hadst thou not intended that we likewise, by partaking of thy sufferings, should hereafter be made partakers of the glory of thy triumph in a happy immortality.

XXVII.—EASTER DAY.

ON THE COMMON CAUSES OF RELAPSE.

"Christ rising again from the grave, dieth now no more; death shall no more have dominion over him."—*Rom.*, vi, 9.

The victory of Jesus on this day over death and sin insures to him for ever the price of his sufferings—the fruits of his ministry, the perpetuity of his Church, the fidelity of his disciples, the conquest of the universe, the triumph of the cross, and the salvation of all the nations of the earth.

Never again will he be surrounded with the appendages of mortality; these he has left behind him in the grave. All that he possessed mortal and earthly was fastened to the cross: having once died, he dieth now no more. The power which he receives from his Father on this day will never be taken from him. His new empire will be eternal; and his glorious and renewed life will be as immortal as the Divinity itself.

This, my beloved, is the grand characteristic of the resurrection of our Lord; this is the principal point which St. Paul proposes to our consideration in the words of my text: "Christ rising from the dead, dieth now no more."

Whence comes it then that our resurrection from the death of sin to the life of grace at this time, by the participation of the sacred mysteries, is of such short duration? Whence comes it that our new life is only of an instant; and that our former passions hardly wait the conclusion of the solemnity before they resume their wonted influence?

Let us examine into the reason of this general and deplorable evil; the discovery of the cause will be the discovery of the remedy. You do not persevere in the happy newness of life which you have attained by the virtue of the sacraments, first, because you pay no attention to the solemn promises which you made at the tribunal of penance; and secondly, because you neglect to make reparations where they are

required—reparations on which the durability of your new life absolutely depends.

These are the usual causes of your relapses after the conclusion of this solemnity. To these I will call your attention; and may the Holy Ghost enlighten your souls, and enable you to apply the proper remedies to all your spiritual disorders.

1. Christ accomplished after his resurrection all the promises which he had previously made to his Father: he glorified him: he extended the knowledge of his name over the whole earth; and he formed a congregation of believers who were to adore him in spirit and in truth. The promises which he made to his disciples he likewise fulfilled. He promised that he would endue them with power from above; that he would infuse a strength and wisdom into their souls which the whole world should be unable to withstand; and that he would appoint them to be the spiritual judges of life and death. He promised them the conquest of the whole world, the keys of heaven and hell, the conversion of kings and empires, the triumph of the cross, the destruction of idols, and the universal establishment of the doctrine of salvation. These were truly noble promises. But no sooner is he risen than he begins to accomplish them; and, if the miracle of his resurrection may be said to certify the truth of his promises, it may likewise be said, that the accomplishment of his promises is a most decisive proof of the miracle of his resurrection.

Here, then, is a plentiful source of instruction. When we entered upon a new life by virtue of the sacraments, we made many promises to God. If it be asked whether we shall fulfil them, what answer will it be proper to give to such a question? Will it be said of us, as of our Saviour, that the miracle of our resurrection has proved the sincerity of our promises, and that the accomplishment of our promises is the most certain testimony of the miracle and of the reality of our resurrection? Would to God that no other testimony may be given of any individual in this assembly.

But what were our promises? We acknowledged before God the emptiness and vanity of the world, and we engaged to withdraw our affections from it, and to fix them upon him. We confessed the injuries and affronts we had offered to his sacred person, and we promised never to repeat them for the time to come. We declared that we had abused his graces and inspirations, and we promised that we would correspond with them in a proper manner for the future. We took a review of all our failings, and we were determined to correct them. We engaged to strengthen ourselves against future

temptations by a more assiduous attention to prayer, by a more frequent participation of the sacraments, and by more than ordinary works of mortification and penance. Impressed with the most lively sense of the mercies, of the patience, and of the forbearance of God, we made repeated protestations of fidelity, and we sealed them with our sighs and tears.

These promises, however, have not hitherto (for we have frequently made them during the course of our lives) these promises have not hitherto extended beyond the imagination in which they were formed. Like the specious projects which amuse the leisure hours of a trifling mind, they pleased us by their novelty. We supposed that we should observe them with ease because we made them without difficulty; and that we should love the reality because we loved the idea. Perhaps, indeed, we observed them for a short time; the shame of violating such solemn promises the moment after we had sworn to observe them before the altar of God, perhaps restrained us for a few days. But our fidelity went no farther. By degrees we persuaded ourselves that our resolutions were scruples; that we had imposed on ourselves an unnecessary yoke, and that it was weakness of mind to make duties where none existed; that salvation did not depend on minute observances; that the zeal which inspired us was laudable, but that we had a very imperfect knowledge of ourselves to suppose that it would continue long; that there is no trifling with God; and that the person who attempts too much is sure to do nothing in the end. Thus were our resolutions forgotten, and our promises broken; and we considered this renewed state of infidelity as a deliverance from a yoke which was becoming burthensome, and as the recovery of a liberty of which we had indiscreetly deprived ourselves.

This, my beloved, was the primary cause of all your former relapses; because, in the first place, your resolutions were adapted to the nature of your spiritual disorders, and were the only specific remedies for effecting their cure. For instance: you made the resolution to devote certain stated times to prayer; and you selected this remedy, because you perceived that, without such an extraordinary aid, your hearts would be overpowered by their depraved appetites, their attachments to the world increased, their piety diminished, and that in the time of temptation they would fall away; you imposed on yourselves additional acts of mortification and penance; and your reason was, because experience had taught you that, by the unrestrained indulgence of pleasure and self-gratification, your dispositions were prone to evil, your tepidity augmented, and your desires of being united to God

in this world as well as in the next, either considerably lessened or totally annihilated. Your other resolutions, in the same manner, were directed against particular failings, and had all a tendency to effect their cure. These, therefore, being neglected, you were exposed to your former danger, and another fall was the inevitable consequence.

Moreover, by accustoming yourselves to violate your resolutions without scruple, you contract the dangerous habit of acting contrary to the dictates of your own hearts; you destroy that delicacy of conscience which is requisite for the support of virtue; you silence the interior monitor, which incessantly upbraids you for the most trivial faults, and by degrees you break down every barrier both of shame and remorse.

In addition to this, you ought to reflect that the violation of your promises is a formal contempt of the mercies of God, who inspires you with these desires of working out your salvation: it is a tacit acknowledgment that the service of Jesus is irksome to you, and that, in your opinion, the lot of those is preferable who have never been enlightened. Baser ingratitude than this, my brethren, there cannot be. There is something here that is truly shocking to our nature. Such souls as these are an abomination to the Lord; he vomits them out of his mouth, as the scripture expresses it (*Rev.*, iii, 16; he casts them far away from him, and abandons them to the error of their ways.

Ah! my beloved, recal to mind the happy moments when you were prostrate before the altar of God. What sincere regret did you feel for the past! What tender protestations did you make of an inviolable fidelity for the time to come! How often did you declare that the moment of your repentance was the happiest moment of your lives! Ungenerous souls, can you forget, after all these appearances of sincerity and candour, can you forget the promises which, independently of the respect which is due to the Lord of all, before whom they were made, ought to be treated as sacred merely on account of the sighs and tears with which they were sealed? You pride yourselves on your fidelity to creatures. Your word of honour is a sufficient inducement to fulfil every promise. You would not on any account forfeit your title to constancy and fidelity, even when your engagements are criminal. And can you be perfidious to your God without a blush? Is uprightness, and a strict adherence to your word of honour, a virtue which you then only neither covet nor admire, when it is given to the Lord of lords? He formerly complained to his prophet, that the sinner made no distinction between Him and his creatures: here, this is all that I require of you.

Behave to God with the same respect as you behave to man. Make it a point of honour to be in religious concerns, as well as in your worldly transactions, sincere, upright, generous, faithful, and incapable of betraying the obligation and solemnity of your promises. Nothing, certainly, can be more glorious and honourable than to be faithful to him who alone is worthy of our fidelity and love.

Alas! we rank the violation of the resolutions with which grace inspires us, in the number of trivial faults. Even the regular, the retired Christian, falls daily into those infidelities without scruple. This is the fatal source of all our evils. This is the cause of the diminution of piety, of the loss of grace, and of the anger of God. By this unworthy conduct we grieve the Holy Spirit; we reject his inspirations; we resist the testimony of our own conscience; we make a mockery of God; and we dig a pit for ourselves. Like slender reeds, we are shaken by every wind: like clouds without water, we are incessantly driven out of our course. We contract a habit of inconstancy, and our whole lives become one continual vicissitude of sin and repentance, of tepidity and fervour, of dissipation and retirement. We are always in an uncertain state: we cannot permanently decide either for a life of piety or a life of sin; we always flatter ourselves that happiness is to be found in the state in which we are not. In this manner life passes away; conscience is hardened; the mercies of God are withdrawn; eternity approaches; the decisive moment arrives; the unsuspecting soul is surprised by death in the midst of these dreadful alternatives. She departs this life before she has declared for whom she lives. She ceases to be, before she has decided to whom she belongs; and the sentiments of regret and repentance which embitter her last moments are only, properly speaking, her last act of inconstancy.

2. Our Saviour, in the second place, by his resurrection removed the scandal which attended his ignominious death, dispelled the doubts and fears of his disciples, restored all things to order, and fully satisfied the justice of his Father. Thus, "having died once, he dieth now no more."

Our resurrection from the death of sin must be accompanied with the same effects. Complete reparation must be made for our past disloyalties, and the justice of God must be satisfied. But we are defective in this point, as well as in the former; and to this again, in part, may be attributed our relapses.

After a life of vanity and pleasure, of tepidity and concupiscence, we do not chastise ourselves either by retrenchments

or self-denials. When the forty days of Lent are expired, we think no more of penance until the sorrowful tidings of the next fast are announced. We descend from the cross at this time; but instead of arising to a new life—a life of purity and spiritual joy—we plunge impetuously into the abyss of sensual pleasures and worldly enjoyments. We, perhaps, are sincerely desirous of effecting our deliverance from the bondage of sin and Satan. But what are our motives? Because the yoke begins to weigh heavy on our shoulders; because the hurry and agitation of the passions are no longer pleasing; because the world has lost its attractive charms in our eyes. We, perhaps, would willingly forsake the ways of iniquity. And why? Because the cries of conscience are redoubled; because eternity approaches; because death is at hand; and because the voice of an angry God sounds in our ears. We would gladly embrace a life of virtue; but our only inducement is the pleasure and the happiness of being free from uneasiness and remorse, and the enjoyment of the sweets of interior tranquillity and peace. We seek ourselves only in our return to God. We throw off the yoke of concupiscence, but we do not take up the yoke of Christ; we turn away from the sorrows of guilt, but we refuse to taste the bitter draught of repentance; we divest ourselves of the ignominy of the old man, but we do not put on the mortification of the new; we deliver ourselves from the oppression of Egypt, but we do not enter the laborious paths of the desert; in a word, we forsake the ways of sin, but we have no other object in view than the pleasure of being sinners no longer.

In the second place, we neglect to make the reparations which justice demands. Religion enforces the necessity of giving every man his own, of paying our just debts, and of taking no more than what is our due. If we have transgressed in either of these points, full reparation must be made to the injured party. This is an indispensable duty; but by how few is it observed! The rich, instead of making satisfaction for the past, continue their oppressions and increase their debts. The merchant, the tradesman, instead of restoring their former unjust gains, extend their unlawful dealings, and devise new plans of increasing their profits at the expense of honesty. The servant and the workman, instead of atoning for their former neglect, either by restitution, by a redoubled diligence, or by a more scrupulous inspection, linger on in their accustomed indolence, and, perhaps, even continue to repeat their depredations.

Lastly, we neglect to make reparation for the injuries which our neighbours have sustained by the unrestrained

liberty with which we have exposed their failings and censured their actions. Alas! we foolishly imagine that so many calumnies which we have invented, so many malicious conjectures which we have proclaimed as known facts, so many unfounded suspicions which we have secretly spread abroad—crimes which floods of tears and perpetual silence would hardly atone for; we foolishly imagine, I say, that no other reparation is required than to be more on our guard for the time to come, and never to indulge our uncharitable remarks but in private and in the society of our select friends. Thus do we confirm the opinion which is so prevalent in the world, that whatever other sacrifices the devout observer of his duties may make, he always reserves the liberty of detraction, in order, as it is said, to make amends for the restraints of piety by the pleasure of censuring the vices of others.

These, my beloved brethren, are the causes of our hasty relapses after the paschal solemnity. Our conversion, in order to be real, must be entire; if one requisite be wanting—if we neglect to pay the debt of atonement to the justice of God, or of reparation to our injured neighbour, our conversion is counterfeit, and our fall is at hand.

If, therefore, it be your sincere desire to persevere in the service of God, shun the dangerous rocks which I have described. Ah! my brethren, so exquisite is the happiness of the man who is sincerely united to God—who has removed the wall of separation which has so long kept him at a distance from him—who has thrown himself into the arms of his mercy, after having so long wandered in the painful wilderness of the world—who has reëstablished peace and tranquillity in his soul, after having so long endured the uneasiness and remorse occasioned by sin; so exquisite is the happiness of the man who lives for Him alone who made him—who serves so kind, so beneficent a Master, after having so long borne the yoke of an ungrateful and unjust world—who loves the only object which can impart happiness to its lovers, after having fixed his heart by turns on a thousand objects, which could neither satisfy his desires nor fix his inconstancy—who labours at length for something real and substantial, after having endured so much labour and pain in the pursuit of dreams and shadows; so exquisite is the happiness of the man who has returned to his God—who lives for eternity, after having lived so long for vanity—who is comforted with the well-founded assurance of a state of felicity in the next world, after being convinced by experience that no happiness can be found in this—who endea-

vours to save his soul, after having lived as if he had no soul to save; so exquisite, I say, is his happiness, that were he possessed of all crowns and sceptres, and of the empire of the whole world, and possessed not God, he would possess nothing; and were he, like Job, on a dunghill, and possessed his God, he would possess all things, since he would enjoy peace of mind in this life, and assured hopes of immortality in the next.

Great God! this is the day of thy triumph and glory. Look down with an eye of compassion on this congregation assembled in thy name. Sanctify every individual, I beseech thee. Suffer not thy word to return to thee fruitless. May it this day triumph over all hearts, and draw them to thee. O my God! reward my labours and my solicitudes: my petition is the same which thou thyself didst present to thy eternal Father. I have announced thy name and thy truths to those whom thou didst send me: sanctify them, therefore; perfect thy work, and suffer not one of them to perish. Look down with an eye of pity on this nation: deliver it from the spiritual evils with which it has been so long chastised, and from the temporal judgments which at this instant are impending over it. Extend the empire of thy faith over the whole world, and reduce all mankind into the captivity of thy holy gospel: and, if the petitions of a sinful and unworthy minister can find admittance to thy throne, receive, O God, these effusions of my heart; and may the secret defilements which thou discoverest in my soul be no impediment to the success of my supplication.

XXVIII.—EASTER MONDAY.

ON THE MEANS OF INSURING OUR PERSEVERANCE.

"The Lord is risen, indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."—*Luke*, xxiv, 34.

The mystery of the resurrection has been always celebrated by the Church with particular solemnity, and as the chief festival of the year. This, says the royal prophet, is the day which the Lord hath made—a day of jubilation and praise—a day of honour and glory to the whole community of the elect of God, in heaven and on earth. Now is the scandal of the cross completely done away, and the mysterious language of the Messias fully explained. On this day his mission is authenticated, his ministry acknowledged, his promises confirmed, his predictions accomplished, his doctrine justified, and his labours crowned. On this day his trembling disciples

are invigorated, their sorrow is turned into joy, their incredulity is removed, the enemies of religion are confounded, and the faith of all nations is finally established. On this day the truth of our mysteries is confirmed, and the Church empowered to rise triumphant with her Deliverer from the grave. On this day the means of attaining immortal bliss are secured to us; the tribulations of the flesh are weakened; the sufferings of our exile are alleviated; and a life truly spiritual is proposed to Christians.

Yes, my beloved, Jesus died to crucify the old man, and he has risen to perfect the new: he died to deliver slaves, he is risen to teach us the right use of the liberty of holiness: he died to cancel our debts, he is risen to enrich us with his graces: he died to save the guilty, he is risen to instruct and perfect the just: he died to shut the gates of hell, he is risen to open the gates of Heaven. In a word, "he died for our sins; he is risen for our justification."—*Rom.*, iv, 25. He is risen to animate us to arise with him at this time, and to teach us the most effectual means of preserving the grace which will accompany our resurrection. These are the benefits and this is the instructive lesson contained in the mystery of this festival.

We all desire to partake of the mercies of the Lord, and to share in his triumph. We all purpose to arise to a new life, and to effect a reconciliation with our offended God by means of the sacraments. But shall we complete this great work? This will depend on ourselves. We must follow "the pattern which was shown on the mount."—*Heb.*, viii, 5. "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should walk in his footsteps."—1 *Peter*, ii, 21. It is by this alone that we shall be entitled to a full participation of the blessings of Heaven. Be attentive, whilst I enlarge on this important subject.

1. "Christ rising from the dead, dieth now no more; death shall no more have dominion over him,"—*Rom.*, vi, 9, because his resurrection includes a full and entire renovation; because he brings nothing earthly with him from the grave; and because "death is swallowed up in victory."—1 *Cor.*, xv, 54. This, my beloved, is the pattern, this is the example after which we must model our resurrection, and secure our perseverance.

In order, therefore, to avoid a relapse, we must leave behind us in the grave all the appurtenances of our former vices: "we must be reformed in the newness of our minds"—*Rom.*, xii, 2, and become pure, and holy, and spiritual. One passion neglected preserves all the rest; one wound treated with

undue lenity draws to it the humours of the whole body. Our attention, therefore, must be redoubled; our vigilance must increase; and as our blessed Lord did not reckon that his labours were concluded, or his victory complete, until death was entirely swallowed up in him; so we, my brethren, who are his followers, as long as we have any passions to combat, any desires to repress, any virtues to perfectionate, we, I say, must not consider our resurrection as complete, and must not relax in our exertions, until the new man be formed in our souls.

Nevertheless, the greater number of Christians consider the time of Easter as a time of relaxation, of repose, of liberty, and of pleasure. But I again repeat, that in order to preserve the grace of your resurrection, it must be to you a time of renovation and fervour. The following are my reasons, and they are deserving of your attention:

In the first place, the generality of Christians suppose, that they are now at liberty to devote more time to dissipation, and less to the care of their souls; because the time of public penance is concluded, they imagine that the peculiar advantage of Easter consists in the removal of all those restraints which they had impatiently endured, and that they are to rejoice and be glad on that account. To convince you of the fallacy of an opinion so popular, and so injurious to the sanctity of this time, it will be only necessary to state, that the festive gladness of the Church is occasioned by the victory which Jesus, and with him all the faithful, have gained over the powers of hell; that your return to grace is the only subject of her canticles of joy; and that, if you continue in the way of iniquity, she still weeps and mourns in secret over you, she is still clothed in sackcloth and ashes, and prostrate between the porch and the altar, she still continues to offer up her penitential tears to Heaven in your behalf.

She appears, therefore, triumphant and surrounded with glory at this time, for no other purpose than to celebrate the triumph of grace in your hearts. She considers you as captives delivered by her means from the empire of death and from the powers of darkness. In other respects, the time of her sojourning on earth is not the time of her rejoicing: at a distance from her Heavenly Spouse, rent by schisms, dishonoured by scandals, afflicted by the falls of her children, she sighs incessantly after her deliverance, and even at the time that she is chanting her melodious canticles of joy, she mournfully casts her eyes towards the abodes of Sion, and expresses aloud her ardent longings for the arrival of that

happy moment when she shall be for ever united with the Church in Heaven, of which her Spouse is the visible Pontiff. We will, however, pass over these reasons, which apply to the Church alone, and insist principally on those which arise from the nature of your own dispositions at this time.

In the second place, therefore, if, after a life of dissipation and sin, you have been so happy at this time as to recover your innocence, and to effect a reconciliation with your injured God by virtue of the sacraments, you must consider that you are as yet only infants of grace, newly born to a life of justice and sanctity. In this state of infancy and weakness, you are more exposed to the attacks of the devil and the world, and less able to withstand them than at any other period: it is consequently necessary that you take greater precautions, and be more ardent in your petitions for assistance, in order to be enabled to sustain the conflict.

Moreover, all your labours hitherto have been applied only to the eradication of your vicious habits: an important part still remains to be performed, namely, the great work of atonement for the past. You have, it is true, bewailed your sins at the tribunal of penance; you prostrated yourselves before the minister of reconciliation with the most lively sentiments of compunction and sorrow; we wiped away your tears, repressed your sighs, and consoled your grief. But this is not sufficient. These are not the only fruits of repentance. The guilt of a whole life of dissipation and remissness is not entirely effaced by a few momentary tears. Sins are not expiated as soon as they are forgiven. If you are penitents indeed, where are those transports of zeal, that indignation against yourselves, that eagerness of sufferings, which are always the first fruits of the Holy Spirit in the soul? You are only at the beginning, and you look for gratifications, which the greatest saints never durst think of indulging, even after they had devoted whole years to exercises of the severest mortification. Is it time to rest and to amuse yourselves at the very commencement of your journey? That you should repose a little towards the end of your course, that you should allow of some relaxation after many years of austerity would not be surprising: but the commencements at least of true repentance are always animated and fervent. The King of Ninive on his conversion covered his head with ashes, rent his garments, and chastised his body by sackcloth and fasting. These are always the first effects of grace; the efforts which it inspires are truly heroic: then it is that the good offices of a moderator are required:

then it is that the prudence of an enlightened director is necessary, in order to repress the impetuosity of zeal which animates the soul.

But you, my beloved friends, if you begin by the flesh, can you expect to end by the spirit? If, at your first outset, you are seized with faintness and languor, how will you be able to support the conflicts, the irksomeness, the fatigues which you will have to encounter during the course of your long journey?

Besides, experience will teach you that temptations are never more violent than at this time. Now it is that the devil is enraged at losing his prey. Now it is that he exerts his utmost endeavours, in hopes of reducing you again under his dominion. He now redoubles his attacks; he rekindles your half-extinguished passions; he strews the path with thorns and briars; he throws every obstacle in your way; he magnifies in your eyes every difficulty. In a word, he exhausts every artifice in order to reënter the house of your soul with seven other spirits more wicked than himself.

Temptations, likewise, are not only more violent at this time, but your own powers of resistance are weaker in proportion. Your piety is like a fresh enkindled spark, and it must be nourished with great care and attention: it is like a young plant, which is in danger of being destroyed by the first noxious blast, of being dried up by the least "heat of temptation."

At what time, therefore, can fidelity and watchfulness be more necessary, more indispensable? Would it be prudent to repose, and be off your guard, when all your enemies are prepared for the attack? Is it not now that retirement, prayer, renunciation of the world and its pleasures, the performance of works of mercy, and reading good books, are the most seasonable; and if you expose the treasure which you carry in a heart so little instructed in the means of defence, is it not a manifest proof that you are not unwilling to lose it?

I might likewise urge, that, on account of the fewer exterior aids to piety which are held out by the Church at this time, it is your duty to supply the deficiency by a renewed zeal and attention; for, weak as you are as yet in virtue, this privation is attended with danger. You have reason to fear that, since her exhortations to penance are intermitted, her public fast terminated, and all is joy and gladness around you, you will not be able to stand alone in penitential attire, and resist the temptations to sensual enjoyments which will arise from the liberty of this holy time. The Church

supposes that you are now risen to a new life, and that you no longer require the fostering care of a parent. She has sheltered you hitherto, as it were under her wings, as though you had been recently brought into life, and nurtured you with the blood of Jesus. She now retires within the veil of the sanctuary, and proposes for the subject of your meditations the ineffable mystery of the Unity of God, and of the Trinity of persons, because she concludes that your lives will henceforward be heavenly, and that the only subject fit for the employment of your pious thoughts, is that which is proposed by the Church in Heaven to the contemplation of the elect before the throne of God. Judge, therefore, whether it be proper to indulge in the pleasures of the world at a time when your lives are supposed to be hidden with Christ in God.

Allowing, however, that there would be neither impropriety nor danger in devoting this time to worldly enjoyment, and in intermitting your meditations and self-denials, it would be unjustifiable, I fear, in the greatest part of my present hearers on another account.

A relaxation in the austerity of your lives, if it is at all warrantable in a Christian point of view, can only be so in proportion to the severity of your former penance. Now, my beloved friends, in what manner have you passed the Lent? What have you suffered during a time which the Church has consecrated to the commemoration of the sufferings and death of your Redeemer? In what respect have you distinguished this time from the other seasons of the year? Have you clothed yourselves in sackcloth and ashes? Have you mingled the tears of repentance with your daily bread? Have you devoted more time to prayer, retirement, and to works of charity? Have you been more regular in your conduct? Have you fulfilled the laws of the Church in their just rigour, and by the severity of fasting chastised a body, which, you well know, you cannot chastise too much?

Ah! the just man may, with propriety, wipe away his tears, put on the robes of joy and gladness, partake in the public triumphs of the Church, and taste with her the consolations of this holy season; because, so far from mitigating the rigour of the law of fasting, he has even added to its severity. But you, who could not, or rather would not, comply even with the letter of the law—you, who celebrated the festival of the resurrection with hearts as rebellious, and with passions as headstrong and turbulent as they were before the commencement of the fast—you, I say, so far from being authorized to indulge in relaxations which you have not

merited, are bound at this time to make reparation for your former neglect, to supply the deficiencies which have been suffered to exist, and to change the time of joy into a time of sorrow and humiliation.

These, my beloved brethren, are your duties; this is the rule of conduct which alone will insure your perseverance. In corroboration of the truth of this statement, I might add that the preservation of grace depends on the same means as the acquisition. This is a general and indubitable maxim. If, therefore, you have been truly reinstated in the friendship of God at this holy time, what measures did you adopt in order to affect this happy reconciliation? You had recourse to the tears of compunction; you excited in your souls the most lively sentiments of sorrow; you sedulously avoided the occasions of your former sins; you were sincerely convinced of your weakness, and of the necessity of your prayer and circumspection; you entertained a disgust for the world and its pleasures; you imbibed a relish for the service of God and the duties of piety; you felt a secret horror running through your veins when you reflected on the danger of being surprised in the midst of your sins. These were the means by which you acquired the grace of God; and these are the means by which you must preserve it. Follow, therefore, the happy path which led to your deliverance, and it will conduct you to the end you wish for, if, indeed, you wish to persevere. Reflect that, as your corruption is unceasingly endeavouring to frustrate the effects of grace, you must not relax in any of your exertions to counteract the efforts of your corruption: if you do, you give up the cause at once, and sacrifice the fruits of all your past labours.

Before I conclude, I will address to you the words which the apostle addressed to the newly converted Galatians: "My brethren, stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage"—*Gal.*, v, 1, from which you have been delivered by the grace of Jesus Christ. You have sedulously and piously endeavoured to purify your consciences; you have unfolded the guilt which oppressed them at the sacred tribunal; and will you consent that your tears, your confusion, your humiliation, your sorrow, should be of no avail? Cast off for ever the chains which have so long held you in captivity; suffer not the devouring worm to be regendered in your souls: enter not the paths of iniquity, the ruggedness and the thorns of which you have so long experienced: "be not held again under the yoke of bondage," from which you have been delivered by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Compare the happiness which you enjoy in the state of

innocence and grace with the disquietude which you endured in the state of tepidity and sin. Are not your souls enlivened by the presence of the Holy Ghost? Do you not enjoy a tranquillity and peace which the world and its vanities could never impart? Are not your fears allayed and your anxieties removed? Does not the word of God communicate the most soothing consolation to your minds, instead of the terror and affright which it formerly occasioned? Recal to mind the days of your licentiousness and sloth; could the pleasures which you then experienced be compared with the happiness which you now enjoy? Is not this truly the day, the great day which the Lord hath made? Did you ever witness in the regions of death a day so calm, so delightful, so enchanting? Be steadfast, therefore, and walk on with resolution in the ways of the Lord which you have so courageously entered: be not weary of a yoke which imparts the purest happiness and delight to those who carry it: "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."

You are now the children of light; pride yourselves no this glorious title: despise with a holy contempt every object which is inferior to your splendid hopes. You are the captives of Jesus Christ—the fruits of his death—the trophies of his resurrection; do not diminish the glory of his triumph by returning to the hard and ignominious servitude of his enemy. What more shall I say? The angels who surround the throne of the Lamb—your brethren who are gone before you with the sign of faith—the saints who adorned our once holy island, all look down upon you from their celestial abodes with delight; they all celebrate in their immortal choirs your happy conversion, your deliverance, and your reunion with them, and with the Church in Heaven: they all sing at the foot of the throne canticles of thanksgiving and praise. And will you, my dear brethren, turn away from their harmonious concerts of jubilation, and shut the gates of Sion against yourselves by an unworthy relapse? Will you renounce the love of the citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and break asunder the bands of union which have been so happily cemented? "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage;" exchange not the holy liberty of the children of God for the opprobrious slavery of sin and Satan. You have rejoiced, likewise, the ministers of the Church on earth. They have been the joyful witnesses of your tears and compunction: they have testified to the sincerity of your repentance; they have applied to your souls the blood of the Lamb; they have reconciled you with the altar, and with God, whom you there worship; they have

given you the kiss of peace; they consider you as children of faith whom they have brought forth to Jesus Christ and formed for Heaven by their prayers, their tears, and the tender solicitudes of their pastoral zeal. Will you again fill their hearts with bitterness? Will you force them to weep between the porch and the altar, and denounce against you the judgments which are incurred against those who trample upon the blood of the sanctuary? Will you, instead of being their joy, their crown, their consolation, inflict the deepest wounds in their souls? Ah! beloved Christians, do not you overturn what with so many anxious pains, so much tender solicitude for your immortal welfare, their piety and zeal have enabled them to set up: do not sacrifice the labours of your own repentance. "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage;" return no more to the slavery from which you have been delivered, but preserve the treasure of grace which you have received, until the great day of the Lord, when you will be entitled to present it to Him as the pledge and price of a happy immortality.

XXIX—LOW SUNDAY.

ON SENSUAL ENJOYMENTS.

"There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day."—*Luke*, xvi, 10.

At the time, my beloved brethren, when the restraints of public penance are suspended, and example and inclination invite you to pleasure and enjoyment—at the time when the canticles of spiritual gladness and festivity with which the Church celebrates the mystery of the resurrection, are too often interrupted by the songs of dissipation and worldly joy—at the time when the greater number of the faithful throw off the yoke of mortification, and return with increased relish to the world from which they had been unwillingly separated during the fast of Lent, it will not be unseasonable to call your attention to the history of a man whose manners and dispositions were not dissimilar from yours,, and from whose condemnation you may collect the most undeniable evidence that a life of sensuality and worldly pleasures is a life of sin, and will be succeeded hereafter by torments that will never end.

In vain will you attempt to justify this love of pleasure by alleging your strict attention to the duties of morality and

religion: the rich man was probably the same; he was neither a murderer, a swearer, a sabbath-breaker, nor an oppressor of the widow or the orphan; and yet he was condemned. Hearken to the parable: "There was a certain rich man," says our Lord, "who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; and no one did give him; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in these flames. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." This, my beloved, is a parable delivered by Truth itself; and the whole purport of it is intended, as I will demonstrate by a few instructive reflections, to prove one of the most important points that can be discussed in the system of Christian morality; namely, that a worldly life is a life of sin, and worthy the severe effects of God's eternal justice.

1. In the first place, the parable remarks that he was rich: "there was a certain rich man." Nothing, however, is added to this circumstance. He is not accused of acquiring his wealth by unjust means, nor of behaving with haughtiness or arrogancy in his exalted rank. It is merely stated that he was rich; and it may be presumed that he peaceably enjoyed the patrimony of his ancestors, void of ambition, free from cares, surrounded by tranquil and domestic pleasures, and enjoying the sweets of a property which was his own by right. Could the possession of wealth be more innocently acquired? And yet, this was the first step that led to his condemnation.

In the second place, "he was clothed in purple and fine linen." This, undoubtedly, was a costly dress in those times. But it is not said that he surpassed the bounds which custom prescribed to the people of his rank and station. It is not said that his means were unequal to his expenditure, nor that the labourer, the tradesman, and others who were about him, were sufferers on account of his splendid magnificence. Nothing at all of this is so much as hinted at. Neither is it

said that he endeavoured to ensnare the innocent by the improper adjustment of his dress and that he justified himself by the plea, *that he meant no harm*—a plea by which too many of the fair sex now-a-days endeavour to justify the indecent and artificial display of their personal charms. Nothing of the kind is laid to his charge. It is said that he was rich, that he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and that he was fond of pomp and splendour: and these things were certainly more excusable under the old, than under the new law; for Jesus, poor and debased, had not then given the example, nor displayed in his own person the model of modesty and simplicity.

In the third place, "he feasted sumptuously every day," Here again we must consider that the law of Moses forbade only excess: that strict watch over the sensual appetite which has been prescribed by the gospel was not then enjoined. Milk and honey were a part of the promises made to the sons of Abraham; and it was rational to conclude that the sweets of plenty, which were held out as the recompense of fidelity, might be enjoyed without crime. It is said, indeed, that he feasted *sumptuously*; but it is not said that he ate forbidden meats, or that he violated the fasts and abstinences enjoined by the law. It is not said that he was guilty of debauchery or excess; that the infidel and libertine were his guests; that improper conversation formed any part of his entertainment; or that there was anything in his conduct that marked him out to his associates and others as a loose and dissipated character. No neglect of his religious duties is imputed to him; nor is there anything said from which we might infer that he was either a hard master, an irreconcileable enemy, a perfidious friend, or an unfaithful husband. He is not accused of envying the prosperity of others, nor of defiling his tongue with calumny and detraction. In a word, according to the description given in the gospel, he was fond of the table, and spent his days in Jerusalem in a gay, splendid, and agreeable manner. In other respects, he seems to have been a man of probity, of inoffensive morals, and living in the world as the world expects that men of property should live. It may, moreover, be said, that he seems to have been one of those men whom the public voice extols, who is proposed as a model of rational life, and whom piety itself would hardly venture to condemn.

Now, my brethren, according to the description I have given (and I leave it to any of you to say whether the description is not a just one), does he appear very culpable? Were any man, except our Saviour, to declare that such a life led

to perdition, and that such a man was deserving of eternal torments, would you not exclaim against his intemperate zeal?—would you not cry out in the words of the army of Israel, when Jonathan was condemned by his father Saul: "What has he done? Is he to die because he has tasted a little honey?" Early impressions, I acknowledge, have induced us to form no very favourable opinion of the rich man; but what is his crime? The scripture says that he was rich, that he was superbly clothed, and that he feasted sumptuously every day. Do you discover anything very enormous or criminal in all this? The man who in these times is guilty of no other crime is applauded as a man of virtue, as a model worthy of the imitation of others. "Such a one," they say, "lives up to his rank, does honour to his fortune, and by his morality and probity gives respectability to religion and virtue." Praises are not sufficient; comparisons injurious to the piety of the true servants of Jesus are introduced. "It is thus," they say, "that a Christian ought to live in the world, and to avoid the enthusiastic folly of those men who disgrace piety by their austere deportment and indiscreet singularities." This is the language of worldlings; and I tremble, when I reflect that the only victim of the eternal justice of God, designated by our Lord, is a character which would be held up as a model of virtue in the present age.

Perhaps you may say that the rich man was devoid of charity, and that his treatment of Lazarus was cruel and criminal in the highest degree. It is not for the minister of the gospel to gloss over any transgressions of the law of charity; and therefore I will not pretend to be his advocate, and excuse his guilt. But let us attend to the parable, and perhaps it will appear that the guilt which you, or at least the greater number of Christians, contract, by the violation of the law of charity, is greater than that which is attributed to the rich man. "And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him." There is certainly something shocking to the feelings of humanity in this account. But let us examine into the chief design of the parable, and we shall be convinced that our Lord intended to describe the character, not of an uncharitable and cruel man, but of a man who lived in indolence, and who was too earnestly engaged in pleasure to attend to the wants of the poor; we shall be convinced that the history of Lazarus is only an incident in the parable, and that its main object is to expose the danger of riches and sensual enjoyments.

In the first place, Lazarus was a common beggar—a beggar, who looked for subsistence, not to one individual only, but to the public at large—a beggar who might have been treated as an impostor, or an indolent vagrant, and who might have been passed by unnoticed, as an object who had no just claims on his charity, with as much reason as common vagrants of this description are neglected by you on many occasions.

Secondly, I acknowledge that Lazarus "lay at his gate full of sores." Such an object of distress ought undoubtedly to have excited his compassion: but there was some merit in suffering such a disgusting spectacle as Lazarus was to remain unmolested at his gate, to make it his usual place of resort, and to exhibit constantly before his eyes the display of his multiplied sores, without so much as rebuking him for his intrusion. You, perhaps, on similar occasions, hasten to bestow your charity. But what are your motives? To succour a fellow-creature in distress? To relieve the wants of a member of the same body? To show forth your love for Jesus—the Father of the poor? Or rather, are you induced by the desire of removing, as quickly as possible, such a disgusting object from your sight? And does it not frequently happen that, instead of fixing your eyes on the nauseous spectacle, and endeavouring to form an idea of the ulcerated wounds of your own soul in the sight of God, you distribute your charity by the hand of a servant, in order that your delicate feelings might not be injured? If this be the truth, your delicacy, perhaps, is as offensive to the Almighty, as the indifference and neglect of the rich man.

Lastly: it is said that "Lazarus desired the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and that no one did give him." It is not, however, said, that Lazarus asked for them, or that the rich man refused to give them: he *desired*, says the parable and *no one* did give him. The inattention was undoubtedly criminal. But was it to be expected that a man of his rank and condition should send relief from his own table? would it not have sufficed if he had given general orders to his domestics to administer to him? This is what is usually done by the great (and this might have been done by the rich man); and yet they do not consider themselves responsible if their orders are neglected. In a word, the rich man is censured not on account of anything hardhearted or unfeeling in his character, but on account of the indolence of his disposition, and his want of attention to the distresses of Lazarus. Thus, when Abraham declares to him the cause of his condemnation, he does not say, in the words which will be pronounced by the great Judge at the day of judgment: Lazarus

was naked, and thou didst not clothe him; he was hungry, and thou didst not give him to eat; he was sick, and thou didst not visit him: but, "Son, remember thou didst receive good things in thy life:" thou didst seek thy consolation in the world; thou didst make the abode of thy pilgrimage the place of thy delights. Here every thing is reversed: the tears of Lazarus are wiped away, and thy laughter and joy are turned into mourning: "Son, remember thou didst receive good things in thy life, and Lazarus also evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. This is his great crime. A life of luxury and ease is the great cause of his condemnation; and rash would it be for us to assign other reasons than those which the Spirit of God has assigned in the gospel.

This, perhaps, may excite your surprise. But, my beloved, will it require any deep consideration to discover that the practice of Christian virtue is necessary for salvation? Ah! if a disciple of Moses, living under a carnal and imperfect law—a law, which neither inculcated the sublimer precepts of the gospel, nor so rigorously forbade sensual pleasures—if he, I say, is condemned because he led a soft, voluptuous life, what will be required of the Christian—the member of a crucified Jesus—the child of the new law—the disciple of the gospel? What will be the eternal lot of the Christian, whose life ought to be so perfect, whose self-denials so frequent, whose sensual indulgences so few, and whose expiatory sufferings so numerous? Will he be treated more favourably, do you suppose, than the rich man, if he lead the same voluptuous life, and is careful only to abstain from shameful and criminal excesses.

It is an undeniable truth, founded on the unerring testimony of the word of God, that unless we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, we never shall be admitted into the number of his elect. Now, is nothing more necessary, in order to show forth in our bodies the image of Christ crucified, than to abstain from adultery, from theft, from intemperance, and from the other grosser crimes? Our divine Model, it is true, was free from all these vices: but was this the whole of his virtue? Far from it: in addition to this, he was meek and humble of heart: he forgave and prayed for his greatest enemies: he was not conformed to this world: his life was in direct opposition to its maxims: he never courted nor enjoyed its pleasures or its vanities: he was a stranger to ease: he had not a place whereon to lay his head: he carried his cross from his birth, and he finished his course in the midst of the severest torments: the grand principle which he came to

establish among men was, the principle of self-abasement and self-denial, and his whole life was conformable to it. In this, therefore, he is your model. Whether you are rich or poor, living in the world or retired from it, married or single, old or young, if you do not bear the image of Christ crucified, you are lost for ever.

Nevertheless, provided you live in a regular way, and are guilty of no gross or enormous crimes, you are not apprehensive about your eternal lot; and, indeed, so far are you from being alarmed on that head, that when we urge you to devote the remainder of your days to prayer, retirement, mortification, and the practice of virtue, you coolly reply, that it is dangerous to attempt too much, that it is prudent to avoid the excesses into which others have been hurried by indiscretion, and that you see nothing in your conduct that requires to be corrected. St. Augustine lamented that certain pagans in his time refused to be converted to the faith, on the supposition that nothing more was required of man than to refrain from excesses, to lead a regular life, and to abstain from injuring his neighbour. "My conduct," they said, is blameless; why, then, should I embrace a new religion? If my life were disorderly, you would do well to hold out to me a law, which would place a restraint on my conduct, and prevent me from committing any excess. But if I avoid such things without the help of the law of Jesus, why should I subject myself to it?"

In the same manner, when we exhort these regular people to embrace a more Christian life—a life more conformed to the maxim of Christ and his saints; when we remind them of the solemn promise of renouncing the world and its pleasures, which they made in baptism, and which they ratify by the public profession of Christianity, they reply that religion does not descend to trifles; that Christian morality and piety consist in leading a regular life; in being a good subject, a faithful spouse, a generous, disinterested, just, sincere master, an upright, honest, steady servant, and a friend to all mankind. "These," they say, "are the essentials; with these a person may be saved in any state: the addition of anything else is totally unnecessary; it is all a matter of discretion."

But attend to the sentiments of the same father in another part of his writings. Their conduct, he says, is irreproachable according to the world: they are men of probity—women of regular conduct: they honour their parents: they do not overreach their brethren: they are faithful to their promises; they commit no injustice: but yet, with all these virtues, they

are not good Christians. And the reason is, because *Christians* crucify their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences: whereas *they* cherish and flatter this domestic enemy: *Christians* are not men of this world; whereas *they* are its admirers—its partisans—its slaves: *Christians* offer violence to their own will on every occasion; whereas *they* have no other rule of conduct than their own will: *Christians* are like pilgrims on earth, sighing incessantly after their true country: whereas *they* would willingly fix their abode on earth, and consent to live for ever in this vale of tears: *Christians* consider riches as obstacles to salvation; injuries, contumelies, and affronts, as blessings; afflictions and pains, as favours from Heaven; the figure of this world, as a dream; whereas *they* view all these things in the opposite light: *Christians* are spiritual; whereas *they* are worldly and carnal-minded.

Ah! my beloved, if nothing more were required to form a good Christian, than to abstain from excess, examples of moderation in this kind were not wanting among the pagans; and such examples, let me assure you, as are seldom equalled even among the disciples of Jesus. The excellence of a Christian does not consist wholly in avoiding excess, but more particularly in the practice of the gospel virtues; it does not consist wholly in the possession of the qualities which are admired by the world, such as honour, probity, generosity, uprightness, moderation, humanity, and such other social virtues; but it more particularly consists in being animated with the spirit of Christ crucified, and in possessing a lively faith, a pure conscience, and an unfeigned charity: the Christian must acquire merit in the sight of God by his actions, otherwise he will not be entitled to an eternal reward: his life must be worthy of a saint, otherwise it will be unworthy of a Christian: the tree that bears leaves without bearing fruit, is accursed, as well as the tree that is completely withered: the gospel condemns to the same eternal torments the *unprofitable* as well as the *unfaithful* servant.

Suffer not yourselves, my brethren, to be lulled into a false security. During the whole of your lives, you are required to bear in your bodies the image of your crucified Jesus. The obligation of denying yourselves, of chastising your flesh, and of reducing it into subjection, will never cease. Particular times, it is true, are set apart for a more severe course of penance: but, when those times are elapsed, sensuality is not to be indulged without restraint. "He that is born of God"—1 *John*, v., saith St. John, in the epistle of this Sunday, "overcometh the world;" overcometh its vices and concupiscences; overcometh its vanities and follies; over-

cometh its pleasures and allurements. Stand on your guard, therefore, my dearly beloved, and be resolute. Run the course that is set before you. Fight the good fight, and never forget that it is the battle of the Lord. Take to yourselves the armour of God: assume the lofty spirit of conquerors, and keep in subjection your vanquished enemies—the world, the devil, and the flesh. Bear in mind what it is you are contending for. Fix your affection on Heaven. By these means will you insure to yourselves the possession of it hereafter.

XXX.—SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE PUNISHMENTS WHICH AWAIT A LIFE OF SENSUALITY HEREAFTER: EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CONDEMNATION OF THE RICH MAN. (*Luke*, xvi.)

"Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps."—1 *Peter*, ii, 21.

Vain is it, my beloved friends, to suppose that the sufferings of Christ have exempted his disciples from the obligation of self-denial and penance: vain is it to suppose that the Christian may have his consolation here, and attain to eternal happiness hereafter. "Christ suffered for us," says St. Peter, not to exempt us from suffering, but "he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." Convinced of the reality of this obligation, the saints entered the thorny path with eagerness: when joy was set before them, they embraced the cross, knowing that through many tribulations they must enter the kingdom of Heaven. The patient, the afflicted Lazarus was received into the bosom of Abraham on account of his sufferings; but the rich man, who received good things in this life, and enjoyed his consolation during the days of his mortality, was on that account cast into outer darkness.

With this precept, with this model, and with these examples before our eyes, can we flatter ourselves into a belief that it is not criminal to spend the greater part of life in studying our ease and comfort? Can we dare to hope that, after having fixed our affections on the happiness of this world, we shall be entitled to the happiness of the next? No, Christian brethren; the state of things will be totally reversed after death. They who mourn here will rejoice hereafter: they who rejoice will mourn: sufferings will be

succeeded by happiness, and happiness will be succeeded by sufferings. What a consolation is this to the poor, the persecuted, the afflicted members of Christ; and what an incitement to the wealthy and unoppressed, to forsake the paths of pleasure, and embrace the self-denial of the cross.

In order to elucidate this point more fully, I will deduce my arguments from the same energetic parable which formed the subject of my last discourse. From the terrible description there given of the reverse which takes place in the next world, I will prove to you the necessity of walking in the footsteps of your suffering Jesus, and by displaying before your eyes the rewards conferred on patient suffering, and the punishments received for a life of sensuality and ease, I will encourage you to embrace the only means of insuring your salvation.

"And it came to pass," says our Saviour, "that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell."—*Luke*, xvi, 22. This, beloved Christians, is the new order of things which the Justice of God will establish in the world to come. Lazarus died first; for the Lord hastens to visit his elect, and abridges the days of their sufferings. The rich man survived him; for the Lord opens slowly to sinners the gate of death, in order that they may have time and opportunity for repentance. The rich man, however, dies at last; for worldly wealth, although it cements the closest union between the possessor and the world, cannot avert the stroke of death. He is buried. This circumstance is not remarked at the death of Lazarus. Funeral honours are undoubtedly paid to the memory of the rich man: pomp and splendour accompany him to the grave; and probably a superb monument is erected over the remains of his mortality. But his soul, oppressed under the weight of her iniquities, is ingulfed deep in the abyss of perdition; "he is buried in hell!" The abandoned corpse of Lazarus, on the contrary, with difficulty meets with a friendly hand to convey it to the grave: his end is without honour in the eyes of men; but his soul is led in triumph by the spirits of God to the bosom of Abraham. The one is buried in hell, the other enters the gates of Paradise. The condition of both is now unalterable.

Senseless as we are! of what consequence is it whether the state in which God has placed us during the short moment that we appear on earth, be poverty or wealth, pain or ease? Why are we not solicitous for our future state alone, a state which will be unchangeable and eternal?

Let us, however, continue the history of the parable, and

examine all the particulars relating to the punishment which the rich man endures in the place of torments.

No sooner was he ingulfed in the deep abyss, says our Saviour, than he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham with Lazarus in his bosom. During the time of his mortal life, he never lifted up his eyes to examine into the true state of his interior; he had not a suspicion that the path he was then walking in—a path so secure in appearance, and so much recommended by the world—was the path that would lead him to perdition. It is not so with abandoned sinners: they are generally sensible of their perilous situation; they know that they are walking in the broad road to hell, and their remorse of conscience is assuaged only by the project of a future conversion. But the tepid—the slothful Christians, of whom I am speaking, whose affections are divided between God and the world, and whose piety is little more than the detestation of intemperance and excess—these, I say, generally die before they have discovered the criminality of their way of life. The rich man, therefore, when it is too late, lifts up his eyes, and beholds Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham clothed in the robes of glory and immortality. This is the first ingredient of his bitter chalice. A beggar covered with sores is in the palace of comfort and happiness; and he, the possessor of unbounded wealth, is consigned to everlasting flames. What a reverse, my dear friends! With what envy does he recal to mind the former distressed state of Lazarus; and with what anguish and rage does he behold his own unhappy lot. In a moment a distinct idea is formed in his mind of the immense happiness which he has lost, and of the irreparable evils which he has incurred. He comprehends the whole extent of the unchangeable delights of Lazarus, and at one view he beholds the dreadful complication of torments which await him for eternity. Painful, my beloved friends, is the representation of lost happiness; more painful, if possible, than the sense of present sufferings. Yes, Heaven, says a holy father, will torment the sinner more intolerably than the flames of hell.

In this manner will God display the splendours of his glory, and unfold the Heavens before those millions of souls who are the victims of his eternal justice. In this manner will he expose to the view of every individual of the damned, the object the most calculated to excite his rage and increase his torments. From the midst of the flames will these children of wrath behold, through all eternity, their brethren, their friends and relatives, enthroned in their seats of immortal bliss, united with the God whom they served. This

sight alone will constitute their greatest torment. They will reflect that they were created for the same happiness, and that their hearts were formed for the enjoyment of the same God.

In general, the sight of an object to which we have no right, or for which we have no affection, excites no regret for its loss. But here an irresistible impulse, with a velocity far outstripping the flight of the swiftest arrow, will carry the heart towards the bosom of its great Creator, when an invisible hand will suddenly interpose, and, arresting it in the height of its progress, will hurl it impetuously back again at an immeasurable distance: far from the object of its fondest wishes, it will endure eternally the cruel pangs occasioned by its violent efforts to unite itself with its Creator, its end, the centre of all its desires: and it will be restrained by the dreadful chains of divine vengeance, and fixed for ever to its place of torments.

The Lord of glory himself, in order to increase their despair, will appear to them in greater splendour and magnificence, if possible, than to his elect. He will exhibit before their eyes his whole majesty. He will excite in their souls the most lively sentiments of a loss of which their nature cannot be divested: and by the display of his clemency, goodness, and munificence, he will inflict a more bitter wound in their souls than by the terror of his justice and wrath. On earth, my beloved friends, we are not susceptible of that ardent love which the soul is capacitated to feel for her God, because the false pleasures which surround us, and which we take for real blessings, either divide or totally absorb our affections. But when the soul is separated from the body, all these phantoms which deceive her will vanish, all these attachments will cease. She will be unable to love anything except her God, because she will be convinced that God alone is worthy of her love. All her affections, her desires, her whole being will be centred in him. Every thing will seem to draw her into his embraces, and the weight of her iniquity will fasten her immoveably to the place of torments. Thus being incessantly forced to attempt her flight towards Heaven, and incessantly thrust back into the abyss, she will be more cruelly tormented by her inability to cease from loving, than by the terrible effects of the justice and wrath of him whom she loves.

The rich man suffers, in the second place, from the recollection of the good things which he enjoyed during life. "Son," says Abraham, "remember thou didst receive good things in thy life." What a crowd of tormenting thoughts

must at that moment have rushed into his mind! What are now the pretended pleasures which he enjoyed during the dream of life? What satisfaction can they impart to him in the midst of his flames? Oh! he is sensible that these words are addressed to him, not in order to administer consolation to his soul, but to reproach him for his folly and madness. The same sentence will resound in the ears of every condemned sinner for all eternity: "Son, remember thou didst receive good things in thy life." Remember the days which thou didst spend in luxury and ease. How averse wert thou to momentary sufferings, and how eager in the pursuit of transient delights! Console thyself with the thought of what thou hast enjoyed. Thou didst prefer the pleasures of a moment to the pleasures of eternity; be patient, therefore, and submit to the evils which thou hast deliberately chosen.

Again, he will be reminded of the gifts of grace which he has abused, not indeed in the tone of irony, but of open reproach: "Son, remember thou didst receive good things." Thou wast a member of the true Church, a child of the saints; thou didst receive the benefit of a Christian education; I endowed thy heart with good dispositions; I displayed before thy eyes models of every virtue; I provided thee with books both of instruction and example; I exhorted thee to embrace a life of piety by the mouth of my ministers; I incessantly spoke to thy soul by secret inspirations, and urged thee to provide for thy salvation by the sudden and unprovided death of numbers of thy acquaintance; I impeded the ways of vice by every obstacle, and smoothed with the greatest care the paths of virtue; in a word, I did so much for thee, that thou mightest have saved thy soul with less difficulty and labour than what it has cost thee to lose it. Remember, then, ungrateful soul, the graces which thou hast abused, and behold how easy it would have been to avoid that terrible abyss into which thou hast fallen.

These sufferings, again, are increased by the eternal tortures which he endures: "He is tormented in flames," he is enveloped in fire and brimstone, so intensely burning that he is fain to petition for one drop of water only to comfort him: "Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in these flames;" and even this consolation is denied him. Instead of purple and fine linen, he is now clothed with a garment of fire, and in proportion to the delicacies which he had enjoyed, so much torment and sorrow is given to him. (*Rev.*, xviii, 7).

We know not, indeed, the whole extent of his sufferings, and therefore I will not pretend to disclose them, lest I should

throw a shade over the dreadful picture. This is all that we know; that for nearly two thousand years he has incessantly cried out in the midst of his tortures, "I am tormented in this flame." We know that he suffers more than eye has seen, ear heard, or the heart of man can conceive. We know that eternal flames, enkindled by the wrath of an angry God, envelope his soul. We know that in this dungeon of horror and despair the victim is salted with eternal fire. (*Mark*, ix, 48). We know that a secret and devouring worm, fixed by God in the midst of his heart, will prey for ever on his vitals, and his tears will never extinguish the flames that encompass him. We know that, wearied with blaspheming the Author of his existence, he will weep and gnash his teeth in the most dreadful agonies of despair. We know that, in the excess of pain, he will for ever curse the day on which he was born, and the womb that bore him; that he will call on death, and death will not come to his relief. This we know, for these are expressions taken from holy writ; but they do not convey an adequate idea of his sufferings.

Infinite as these evils may appear, they are again aggravated by the reflection that they will last for ever. "Besides," said Abraham, "between us and you there is a great chaos: so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither."

Sufferings which will end are always attended with some consolation: hope is a soothing occupation to the mind. But to the condemned sinner, futurity is the most dreadful reflection. The farther he extends his views into that immense space, the more distant do the boundaries appear: eternity alone is the measure of his torments. Willingly would he banish eternity from his thoughts; but the justice of God places it incessantly before his eyes, forces him to behold it, and to make it the constant subject of his contemplation.

Ah! dear Christians, these are sufferings indeed: what a complication of evils await the unhappy soul who refuses to walk in the footsteps of his suffering Jesus during the days of his mortal pilgrimage. I pass rapidly, however, over these great truths; for they are truths of which the recital alone is sufficient. They contain plentiful sources of meditation; and I will leave it to my hearers to weigh them more attentively in private.

Lastly, the rich man suffers on account of his brethren who survived him, and to whom he had probably been an occasion of sin by his voluptuous mode of living. "Father Abraham," says he, "at least send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify to them,

lest they also come into this place of torment: for they will not believe unless a person arise from the dead."

My beloved friends, many souls, perhaps, with whom you were connected during their abode on earth, are now buried in hell, and receive an increase of torture from every fault which you commit, because they were in part the cause of your depravity. Perhaps a father, a mother, whose love for you was too great, or rather, whose love was misplaced; who favoured you in your growing passions, who attentively provided you every advantage for the world, but who neglected, or paid little attention to your spiritual welfare; who perhaps instilled into your mind the moral virtues, but never inculcated the Christian virtues of meekness, humility, and love; who loved the world, and conformed to the world, and taught you to do the same; ah! perhaps their unhappy souls are crying out from the bottomless abyss, and entreating the Almighty to allow them to appear before you enveloped in flames, and to endeavour to reclaim you from the vicious habits you contracted through their neglect. Perhaps a brother, a sister, a friend, an acquaintance with whom you were too familiar, with whom you learned to offend God, whose example and allurements enticed you to sin, are now uttering unavailing lamentations, and soliciting in vain for permission to display before you the horrors of their state, and excite you to repent of faults of which they were in part the cause. Perhaps many souls to whom you yourselves have been the occasion of sin, either by dress, example, or allurements, are now immured in the deepest abyss through your fault, and are earnestly entreating to be allowed to exhibit before you the dreadful effects of your irreligious deportment, in order either to move you to repentance, or at least deter you from precipitating others into that place of woe.

But what reply will be given to their entreaties? *They have Moses and the prophets,* will the Almighty say, and in addition the precepts of Jesus Christ. If the scriptures are insufficient to excite them to repentance, it would be to no purpose that a man appeared to them from the dead. You fondly imagine that the sight of a miracle—of a man risen from the dead—of an angel speaking to you on the part of God, would induce you to reform your conduct, and renounce the vanities of the world; but you are deceived, it would produce no such effect; you would discover reasons to doubt the reality of the appearance; your corrupted heart would still allege pretexts to refuse its submission. The miracles of our Saviour removed neither the hypocrisy of the Pharisees,

nor the incredulity of the Sadducees. The greatest miracle which you can witness is the sublimity of the Christian doctrine, the purity of its moral precepts, the dignity and divine origin of its scriptures, and its wonderful propagation over the world. If these miracles do not move, enlighten, and reform you, in vain would Providence work in your favour any other prodigy. *They have Moses and the prophets. If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe if a man arose from the dead.*

Let me exhort you, therefore, my beloved friends, to peruse these sacred books with leisure and attention: it is the advice which is given by our Saviour in the words quoted above: let a chapter both at morning and night be your regular lecture. Ah! if you meditated attentively on these divine writings, it would not be necessary to adduce arguments to prove that a worldly life, a life of luxury and pleasure, although free from vice and excess, is a life of sin; it would not be necessary to inform you that the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, that the Christian must deny himself, and not seek his consolation in this world; that he must use this world as if he used it not; and that if he loves his soul in this life, he will lose it in the next: all this, I say, would be unnecessary, for these are the most simple, the most familiar truths of the gospel.

Besides, what is the duration of our pilgrimage on earth? Is it of sufficient length to warrant our devoting the greater part of it to pleasure, or is the happiness which awaits us hereafter so insignificant, so trifling, as to excuse our abhorrence of the painful duties which will insure to us the possession of it? Our life on earth is only a moment. In the twinkling of an eye the world vanishes again from our sight, and we are hurried into the abyss of eternity. If the only pleasure which you were to enjoy during a long life, was to be confined within the compass of a dream, and if the remainder of your days was to be devoted to unutterable torments for the pleasure which you indulged during that dream, would your lot appear enviable? And yet, this, says St. Chrysostom, is the case of those who live in ease and comfort here, and neglect their eternal welfare. You resemble the man who dreams that he is happy, and who when he has dreamt his dream, is awakened by the sound of a terrific voice, and, instead of the phantom of felicity, which had beguiled his imagination, beholds with astonishment the smoke of eternal flames issuing from the bottomless pit, prepared to punish him for the transient pleasures which he had indulged.

Meditate, my beloved brethren, on these sacred truths: let

the hopes and the duties of your vocation be your only study and delight, and then you will make such use of the perishable things of this world, as not to lose those which are eternal.

XXXI.—THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF THE LAW OF GOD.

"What is this he saith?....We know not what he speaketh."—*John*, xvi, 18.

How frequently, my beloved brethren, are these words of the disciples adopted by the imperfect followers of Jesus, when they are admonished that their tepid and immoral conduct is condemned both by the testimony of their own conscience and by the gospel, and that they are walking in the broad road which leadeth to perdition. "What is this?" they say: "we know not what he speaketh." Does he say that our conduct is condemned by the testimony of our conscience? How can this be reconciled with the peace of mind which we enjoy? Is not this tranquillity a sufficient proof of our innocence? We are not conscious of any impropriety in our conduct: if we were, we would instantly reform. He assures us that our ways are clearly and expressly condemned by the gospel. "But what is this that he saith?" The scriptures are not so clear and intelligible on certain points as he pretends. Divines interpret them different ways; and what seems positive to one, does not appear in that light to others.

In answer to these pretexts, by which so many endeavour to maintain the lawfulness of the maxims and customs of the world, I reply, in the first place, that the law of God is stamped on our hearts in plain and indelible characters; and secondly, that the perspicuity of the precepts of God contained in the scripture, is tacitly acknowledged by all.

As the subject is too copious for one discourse, I will confine my discussion to the first part, and I will prove that a candid mind cannot allege ignorance as a justification of its disorders; that the law is deeply implanted in our nature; and that the criminal will hereafter be judged and condemned by the testimony of his own conscience alone.

1. I cannot conceal my astonishment when the worldling attempts to prove that he acts not in opposition to the dictates of conscience, because he experiences a certain tranquillity of mind in the midst of his enjoyments. For what proof can be deduced from this? Is peace of mind a sure and infallible

sign that a man is innocent? No, to a certainty, it is not. On the contrary, in most cases where this composure of mind is felt, as it undoubtedly is felt by many who are the most occupied with the concerns of this world, it ought to be viewed with a cautious and suspicious eye, as a matter that should rather intimidate than console them: for peace in the ways of sin is a punishment inflicted by an angry God, and a presage of perdition. But it is not true that he enjoys tranquillity: conscience is a tribunal to which he ought on no account to appeal; for by no one is he so severely condemned as by himself.

I acknowledge, indeed, that there may be sinners so hardened, as to be seldom enlightened by the rays of grace and truth; that a man may live in the abodes of darkness and sin without uneasiness and without remorse; and that his conscience may be seared, as the apostle emphatically expresses it. (1 *Tim.*, iv, 2). But these examples of divine justice, terrible beyond all that can be thought of, occur but seldom, and whenever they do occur, they only show to what a deplorable and abandoned state a creature may be reduced, when, in just punishment for having forsaken his God, he is left to the workings of his own corrupt and depraved nature, and is forsaken by him.

Yes, my beloved: whether you affect to revolt openly and avowedly against the authority of the law, like the abandoned profligate; or whether you attempt to soften its severity, and ingeniously to reconcile it with your passions by favourable interpretations, like the generality of Christians, your conscience will give testimony to the divine law, and declare that its precepts are equitable, and that the observance of them is indispensable. In the first place, it will tell you that they are equitable. You are obliged to acknowledge that God is too wise not to love order and justice; and that he is too good, at the same time, not to consult our well-being in all his ordinances. This you are obliged to acknowledge, and, consequently, you must be fully aware that his laws are founded on justice, and command nothing but what is proper and necessary; and that they are founded on a wise clemency, and enjoin nothing but what tends to the welfare and happiness of mankind.

In fact, who is there that is not convinced that meekness, humanity, temperance, and chastity, and the other virtues which the gospel enjoins, are in strict conformity with the true interests of man, and are the only sources of pure delight? and that pride, impatience, anger, intemperance, impurity, and the other vices which it condemns, are the only sources

from whence unhappiness and misery flow? We all know and we all confess, that the farther we stray from the bounds of duty, the more are our conflicts and anxieties increased; and that the nearer we approach to God, the less occasion we have to be disturbed at the view of what is passing in our interior.

In this manner do our hearts give testimony to the law of God. In vain do we throw off the yoke of obedience with a view to any earthly enjoyment. It is impossible that we can be justified in our own estimation, or reap any satisfaction from a mode of conduct of which we do not really approve. The moment of retirement and reflection will come, when we shall be left alone to commune impartially with ourselves: then it is we always take part with the law of God against the injustice of our own proceedings. Then it is we find in our souls the apology that is there written in favour of virtue, opposed to the violence of our inordinate propensities. At such a moment, nothing that we can say or do will ever bribe this interior advocate for the truth, or prevent it from pleading powerfully within us.

But to enter more into detail. In vain do we indulge the passion of hatred and revenge: we quickly discover, that the satisfaction it imparts is not congenial to the feelings of the heart, and that hatred is a self-inflicted torment. When the violence of the passion is abated, milder sentiments take possession of the breast, we are ashamed of the excess into which we had been hurried, and we admire the meekness and self-command which distinguish the character of the true Christian. Thus are we constrained to acknowledge that benignity and goodness were our original endowments, and that the law which commands us to love our neighbour, and to return good for evil, is agreeable to the most noble, the most rational sentiments of the soul, and tends to reconcile us with ourselves. "Thou art more just than I," said Saul to David in the height of his animosity. The benignity which nature has implanted in the hearts of all men, extorted this confession, and declaimed against the injustice and severity of his revenge.

In vain do we plunge into the abyss of brutal and sensual delights: in vain do we seek with unabating ardour to satisfy our appetite for pleasure: we soon perceive that licentiousness leads us to too great lengths to be comformable with nature; that every passion which tyrannizes over us, and brings us into subjection, is subversive of the native dignity of our immortal being, and that the gospel, by laying a restraint on our voluptuous passions, has prescribed the only means of

acquiring true peace of mind, and of preserving untarnished that elevation, that nobleness of soul, with which our Creator primitively endowed us. How many hired servants have bread in my father's house, said the prodigal son, enslaved by the tyranny of a shameful passion, whilst I am here perishing for want in the midst of swine! (*Luke*, xv, 17). This was the feeble voice of reason, the only remnant of his noble origin, which, notwithstanding his profligacy, still whispered to his soul.

In a word, examine all the precepts of the law of God, and you will discover that they have all an intimate connection with the heart of man; that they are founded on a perfect knowledge of all that passes in our minds; that they prescribe remedies to our most secret defects, and point out the means of improving and invigorating all that is good and praiseworthy within us. Who but the great Searcher of hearts could have delivered such precepts to mankind? The pagans themselves, in whom the innate light of truth was not entirely extinguished, venerated the morality of the Christian doctrine. They were constrained to acknowledge the wisdom of its laws, the necessity of its prohibitions, the sanctity of its counsels, the justness and sublimity of its ordinances. They were surprised to discover in the discourses of Jesus a more exalted philosophy than in the schools of Greece and Rome: they could not conceive by what means the Son of Mary acquired a more perfect knowledge of the duties, the desires, and the secret inclinations of the heart of man, than their most eminent philosophers.

Yes, my beloved brethren; so conformable are his precepts to our nature, that were they scrupulously fulfilled by all mankind, the earth would be again a paradise—a land of peace and harmony—a land of pure pleasures and delights; and the whole race of men would form one happy society, each individual rejoicing in the sweets of innocence, and all united together by the bands of universal charity and love.

With what shadow of reason, then, can it be asserted that corrupt nature is our primitive law, and that the gratifying our innate inclinations for pleasure ought not to be imputed to us as a crime? The men who stand up in support of this impiety, are themselves convinced of its falsity: this their ostentatious libertinism is only exterior; the light of truth still glimmers in their souls, and dispels the clouds of darkness which they attempt to raise. The memorable example of St. Augustine is a convincing proof. In the midst of his excesses he endeavoured to harden himself against the cries of nature and conscience; he adopted the most impious

tenets; he ran into the most extravagant errors, in hopes of reconciling his mind to the way of sin, and of allaying the tumults of his breast. But all in vain. The light broke in upon his mind in spite of opposition: the truth was victorious; it raised its voice in the interior of his soul, and condemned his disorders. "I carried with me a soul torn and mangled by my passions, struggling to get loose, and impatient to be held in such a state of violence. I could not hold it; and where to place it I knew not." "Portabam eruentem, et concissam animam meam.....impatientem portari a me, et ubi eam reponerem non inveniebam."—*St. Aug. Conf.*

These were the fruitless conflicts of St. Augustine before his conversion. Similar examples, of inferior notoriety, have existed in every age; and it has been uniformly testified by all of them that they never could efface from their minds the impression of religion and truth; that their hearts, even in the midst of their extravagancies, pleaded in favour of Christian morality; and with all their impious daring in the face of the Almighty, and their senseless railing at the pusillanimity of those who bend implicitly to the dictates of virtue, they never had the fortitude to go boldly forward undaunted and unappalled in pursuit of any of the most fascinating enjoyments with which the depraved appetite of those who are radically vicious endeavours to console itself.

Set it down to yourselves, my beloved, as a maxim which is invariably true, that in every vicious character there is a skulking kind of timidity—a self-created sort of fear, which according to the testimony of the Spirit of God (*Wisd.*, xvii, 10), is sure to betray itself. Yes: I aver it, and nature shows it: the wicked man pays homage to the sanctity of the law which he violates by the terrors and disquietudes which he experiences, and which he cannot conceal. In vain does he put on the mask of heroic fortitude. In the hour of conviviality, amidst the associates of his mirth, this may do well enough: but no sooner does he retire within himself than his mind is haunted by the most terrible phantoms which his imagination can conjure up to upbraid him for his iniquities: sin, which he pursued with so much ardour, pursues him in its turn, and fastening on his heart, like a cruel and rapacious vulture seems to seek, in the inmost recesses of his soul, a just and ample compensation for the short and fleeting pleasures with which the monster had itself so recently regaled him. My God! what a powerful advocate in favour of the beauty and equity of thy law hast thou implanted in our very being.

2. In this manner is the sinner constrained to give testimony to the evidence of the law. But this is not all. He is

constrained, in the same manner, to testify, that the strict observance of the whole code of Christian morality is required of every individual.

It too generally happens that those worldly Christians, who scrupulously abstain from the grosser crimes, and at the same time indulge themselves without restraint in all the pleasures and dissipations which the world is not disposed to discountenance as absolutely vicious—it too often happens, I say, that these worldly-minded Christians endeavour to persuade themselves that they do not transgress the laws of the gospel. They even attempt to impose upon us, and declare that their conscience does not reproach them with any sin, and that they do not see how their salvation is exposed to danger. But, my beloved, this is all an illusion.

The fact is, and it cannot be concealed from any of us—the fact is, that our passions are naturally headstrong; and as our propensities, arising from the corruption of our fallen nature, are bent to evil, there would be no possibility of keeping any of them within the bounds which reason, as well as religion, prescribes, were it not for some law or other to control them. None will dispute the necessity of such a restraint. Now as there can be no restraint without a proportionate degree of severity, and as no little restraint is required to keep the passions under subjection, the law which does that must of necessity be severe. The restraint which it imposes must be strict and general. It is clear, then, that the law of Jesus, which was instituted for no other purpose than to operate as a constant restraint upon the passions, cannot possibly be brought to give way to our inclinations in any one instance: that, as it is intended to rectify all our propensities, it must be opposed to all: that, as it is meant to repress our corrupt desires, it cannot be supposed to accommodate itself in favour of any them: and that, as it has professedly no other object in view than to resist the encroachment of self-will, to meet it by self-denial, and finally to destroy and utterly eradicate its pernicious influence over the heart, it cannot be allowed to flatter it by any thing like that discretionary power, which is claimed by worldly-minded Christians, of gratifying the sensual appetite in any of its caprices.

Your own consciences will bear ample testimony to the truth of this statement. Can you candidly declare that you believe that the life of dissipation and luxury which you lead is the road to happiness? Would you dare to appear before the tribunal of God in the state in which you now are? Ah! in your more serious moments you tremble at the idea: you resolve to reform, to renounce the vanities and follies of the

world, and to dedicate more time to the duties of religion. And what may be inferred from this resolution? That in your own minds you are thoroughly convinced that the gospel enjoins a much more severe mode of conduct than that which you are now pursuing.

I will appeal, moreover, to your own expressions. You severely censure those Christians who endeavour to unite the exercises of piety with the abuses and pleasures which you call innocent. You turn their devotion into ridicule: you preach up the whole severity of the gospel: you say, that a person ought to renounce the ways of the world at once, or continue to live as the world does: that all these equivocal virtues tend only to throw a scandal on true piety. In this I agree with you. But, my dear friends, if your consciences declare that salvation is endangered by a partial dedication of the soul to God, can you with sincerity stand up in defence of your own innocence, when no part of your hearts is dedicated to him? You condemn the false security of those Christians whose affections appear to be equally divided between God and the world; and can you pretend to excuse your own conduct, when it is clear that the world has engrossed the greater part, if not the whole of your affections? Can you suppose that the road to life is more rugged for those who profess to follow virtue, than for you who profess to follow vanity? Be consistent: either refrain from making any reflections on worldly piety, or do not pretend to justify a worldly life.

Another proof of your insincerity may be collected from your declamations against the expounders of the divine law. You say, that we deprive human weakness of all hope; that if it be necessary to observe all that we prescribe in our sermons, you ought to retire into the deserts, and live more like angels than men. But, my beloved brethren, supposing that a minister of God were to preach to you a different doctrine from what we preach, and declare from the pulpit that you may serve God and love the world at the same time; that there is no other harm in all the dissipations and pleasures of worldlings than what the person himself is pleased to admit: that the man who lives in the world, ought to live like the world; that crosses and self-denials are proper for the cloister but not for you; that God is too good to take account of those trifling liberties and gratifications about which we attempt to raise scruples in your minds: supposing, I say, that a minister were to preach these maxims, what would be your opinion of his doctrine? What respect would you show to his ministry? Would you venerate him as an angel

descended from Heaven to illustrate the precepts of the gospel? No: you would smile either at his ignorance or his folly, or, more probably, you would express your abhorrence at his daring profanation of the word of God.

My brethren, shall the maxims, which would appear to you extravagant and irreligious when delivered from the pulpit, appear conformable to reason and to the spirit of Christianity when delivered by you in common conversation? You would reject them as false, as impious, from the mouth of God's minister; and will they contract a greater degree of wisdom and truth by proceeding from your own lips? You would ridicule, or rather you would entertain a bad opinion of the preacher who announced them: and can you be in earnest, or consistent, when you so confidently maintain the lawfulness of them in your own conduct?

Ah! how insincere are we with God! how terrible will he appear when he shall avenge the honour of his law, according to the decisions of our own hearts! Truly, said an apostle, if, notwithstanding our blind affection and partiality for ourselves, we cannot refrain from reprobating our conduct in private, what sentence ought we in reason to expect from the great searcher of hearts on the day of final retribution?

Study, therefore, the law of God, as it is written in your hearts, and you will discover that no greater indulgence is lawful than what we prescribe. Hearken to the voice of truth which whispers in your interior, and you will acknowledge that we only repeat the maxims which it continually inculcates.

In order to be enlightened in your doubts, says St. Augustine, it is not necessary that you consult the learned: apply to your own hearts for advice; listen to their decisions; follow the first motions which they inspire, and you will always embrace the side which is most conformable to the law of God. Your unbiassed reason will reject the mitigations of self-love, and advise a stricter and more unqualified obedience to the law than we dare to advise: and if there be any need of our decisions in the end, it will be rather to moderate your severity than to reprobate any improper indulgence.

Thus are our hearts stamped with the broad seal of truth; and thus will they be witnesses against us hereafter at the latter day. The Lord will apply to no other source for records and proofs for the determination of our eternal lot: we shall stand before his tribunal, says Tertullian, both as the criminals and as the witnesses. "You knew the truth," the great Judge will say, "and you detained it in injustice:

you acknowledged that they were happy who served me, and you would not serve me yourselves: you painted in lively colours the ingratitude, the folly, and the vanity of the world, and you were always its senseless admirers and slaves: you respected the religion of your forefathers, and you would not practise it: you were convinced of the necessity of mortification and penance, and you sought only a life of comfort and ease: you dreaded in secret the judgments of God, and in public you affected not to believe in him."

My God! how incomprehensible are our ingratitude and folly! Thou hast fixed a light in our souls, which exposes to view the wretched state of our interior, and points out the only path to justice, truth, and happiness; and we, so far from proclaiming the wonders of thy mercies, pride ourselves on an imaginary obedience of heart, which will, sooner or later, become real, and be a just punishment for the crime of resisting the efforts of thy love. Give us grace, we beseech thee, to be obedient to the voice of conscience, that, under its direction, we may run on in the paths of righteousness, until we obtain possession of thy eternal promises.

XXXII.—FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF THE LAW OF THE GOSPEL.

"When he is come, he will convince the world of sin, of justice, and of judgment."—*John*, xvi, 8.

The purpose for which man was created, was no other than that he might serve and glorify his Almighty Creator in this world, and enjoy him for ever in the next. As this evidently was the object of his existence, it was necessary that he should be endued with a principle of knowledge every way proportioned to the exalted nature of his high and immortal destiny, and capable of instructing him in all the various duties which, as a rational, intelligent being, he owed to God, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself. This was imparted to him by the same beneficent Being who first drew him into life; for he enkindled in his soul a bright flame which enlightened his understanding, and sufficiently demonstrated not only the relative situation in which he stood, but all the several correspondent duties inseparably annexed to it.

In the beginning this interior light sufficed for his direction. But, in process of time, all flesh having corrupted its ways, this supernatural light was extinguished in the minds

of the greatest part of mankind by the overflow of iniquity: and even the light of reason was so far obscured as to cease to be that clear—that manifest guide in the paths of moral virtue, which it had been before, and its existence in the soul seemed to produce no other effect than that of rendering man more inexcusable. Again the mercies of God came to his relief. He, whose love seemed to increase in proportion as his creatures became ungrateful, engraved on tables of stone the law of nature, that is, the law which he had primitively engraven on his heart, and placed before his eyes a summary of the duties which he was required to perform.

The written law, in course of time, experienced nearly the same fate: it was obscured and defaced by the interpretations of the people with whom it was deposited.

At length the Saviour himself came down on earth. He restored it to its original purity: he dispersed the clouds of darkness, which vain wisdom and human traditions had collected around it: he displayed its sublimity to view, and applied its maxims to the weakness of human nature: and after having delivered his precepts to his disciples in the clearest terms, he promised to send the Paraclete, who should effectually "convince the world of sin, of justice, and of judgment."

But, notwithstanding the communications of the word and of the Spirit of God, it is still said the law is ambiguous and obscure. The interpretations and sophistry of its unworthy followers, have, I will not say obscured the law, but so biassed the mind, that even the world pretends that the gospel is in its favour.

But, my brethren, I will prove in this discourse, that the laws of the gospel are clear and precise, and that the sinner will be hereafter condemned both by the testimony of his own conscience, and by the evidence of the law.

1. "The commandment of the Lord," says the royal prophet, "is lightsome, enlightening the eyes,"—*Ps.*, xviii, 9, even the eyes of those who prefer darkness before the light. We might have questioned the wisdom and goodness of God, if the great Legislator, who came to deliver to mankind the laws of light and truth for the reformation of morals and the regulation of duties, had drawn them up in such obscure and indefinite terms, as to be open to impressions of a contrary tendency, and to appear to favour the very passions which he came to oppose and subjugate. Human laws may be defective in this point; but it is not so with the laws of God: the charge cannot be brought against them without blasphemy.

No, my beloved; our Legislator was fully acquainted with the heart of man; he foresaw every attempt which would be made by succeeding generations to palliate his doctrines, and explain away the precepts which were the most painful to human nature; and therefore he drew them up in a form so excellent, so intelligible, so simple, and so sublime, that the knowledge of his will may be acquired, and the path that leads to eternal life may be discovered, by men of the meanest capacity.

The incomprehensible mysteries of faith, I allow, are veiled in awful obscurity; but the regulation of morals is formal and precise; the duties of life are plain and evident. I pretend not, however, to assert that every obligation peculiar to the different states of life into which mankind is divided are specified and defined, or that no doubt can ever arise in the minds of the sincere and intelligent Christian; but it is a truth—and let me here entreat your most earnest attention—it is a truth, that, although the letter of the law does not mark out every particular duty, the spirit of the law is plain, and applies to all: its general maxims elucidate every difficulty: and the intention of the Lawgiver throws a clear light over every obscurity.

Thus, for instance, if you doubt whether it be contrary to the gospel to love the honours and riches of this world, to be dissatisfied with your state, to refer all your actions and desires to your temporal welfare, the gospel says, that your heart will be where your treasure is (*Matt.*, vi, 21); that is to say, that if your treasure is in Heaven, there will your heart be also. And again, that the true Christian "is not of the world."—*John*, xvii, 16. This is sufficient to solve your doubt.

If you ask, whether the thoughtless spirit of gaiety, and the love of dissipation and pleasure (which appear so innocent in the eyes of the world) be contrary to the spirit of the true Christian, the gospel says: "Blessed are they that mourn,"—*Matt.*, v, 5: "Wo to you who laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep."—*Luke*, vi, 23, 24. Apply these maxims, and your question is answered.

If you ask, whether, living in the world, it is unlawful to live like the world—whether we are to condemn the generality of mankind because they live in that manner—and whether the service of God requires that you adopt singularities which would expose you to the ridicule of others; to this the scriptures reply in plain terms: that you must "not be conformed to this world,"—*Rom.*, xii, 2: that you cannot seek to please men, and continue faithful in your allegiance to Christ

(*Gal.*, i, 10): and that the multitude do not enter the narrow path that leadeth to life. (*Matt.*, vii, 13).

Again, if you doubt whether it be a duty, not only to forgive your enemy, but to see him, to love him, and to assist him with your interest and credit; or whether it may not be more conformable to equity to reserve all your favours and benefits for your friends; the scriptures reply: "if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he be thirsty, give him to drink; for in doing this thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head"—*Rom.*, xii, 20: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you."—*Luke*, vi, 27, 28. Enter into the spirit of these precepts, and be not ashamed to confess that they enlighten all your doubts.

In the same manner, propose any other questions that you please, and they will all be immediately solved by consulting the spirit of the law, even in cases where no intelligence can be obtained by any special reference to the letter.

Cease, therefore, to resist our ministry; and be no longer misled by the supposition, that the abuses against which we disclaim are not condemned by the word of God. Ah! the word of God is sufficiently explicit to the candid and sincere Christian: it throws a clear light over every duty; and it leads him securely, and without impediment, to the gates of eternal bliss.

2. If we examine the primary causes of all these doubts, we shall discover that they originate, not in any obscurities of the law, but in the passions. For, my beloved, who are the men that appear embarrassed and perplexed—who are the men that cavil and dispute, and can never positively decide? They are men, whose interest it is to discover obscurities, to throw a shade over everything that is lightsome, and to see nothing in the gospel that clearly condemns their irregularities. The truly fervent and pious soul, who loves his God, and sincerely desires to be conformed in everything to his holy will, whose passions are subjected to reason, and whose affections are centred in Heaven, discovers neither difficulty nor obscurity: to him the law is plain and evident; and if at any time a doubt arises in his mind, it is rather a pious fear that his actions have not been divested of every imperfection, than a difficulty created for the purpose of excusing any criminal indulgence.

The light of the law, says St. Augustine, resembles the light of the sun: in vain does it shine to the blind man, in vain does it illuminate the universe: he does not see it: he is still in darkness. The sinner is this blind man: the light of

truth surrounds him on all sides: it penetrates even into the inmost recesses of his soul: but his eyes are obscured: he does not see it. Purify your hearts, continues the same holy father, take off the bandage of the passions, with which your eyes are blindfolded, and then the whole law will appear lightsome; your doubts will be cleared, and all your difficulties will instantly vanish.

Interrogate the sinner, who has been converted from the evil of his ways, and he will tell you that this is the truth: he will tell you that his understanding was enlightened in proportion as his passions were repressed: that the duties which before had appeared ambiguous became most evident, most incontestible: and that so great were his astonishment and alarm, that his spiritual guide, instead of being necessitated to contest and to dispute about the extent of his duties, was obliged to conceal the terrible truths of the gospel, to apply words of comfort to his soul, and to moderate the fears which the retrospective view of his disorders had excited. And whence this change of sentiment? Was the law become more evident? No: that was impossible: the gospel was not changed, but the sinner was converted, and his eyes were opened to behold the light.

Another proof of the truth of this statement may be drawn from the clear-sighted and impartial decision that sinners form on those points of the law which do not interfere with their own favourite passions and interests. The avaricious, for example, who turn away their eyes from the precepts which condemn the insatiable love of wealth, readily acknowledge that dissipation and inordinate ambition—passions to which they are strangers—are contrary to the spirit of the gospel. The voluptuous, who endeavour to justify the gratification of their favourite desires, condemn without mercy the low, sordid attachment of the avaricious. The followers of the world, who exclaim against the austerity of the preacher, when he announces the rigorous precepts of the gospel, clearly discern the least remnant of human weakness in the man who professes to follow virtue, and do not hesitate to declare that the slightest failings are incompatible with true piety. The lukewarm Christian, who avoids excess, condemns the profaneness of the libertine; and the libertine laughs to scorn the pretended, the superficial piety of the lukewarm.

Were we to extend our examination, we should acknowledge that we can readily see, and do invariably condemn in other people, the vices to which we ourselves are not peculiarly addicted; that we have no doubts about the spirit of the law in any case where we are not immediately concerned, and

that we exact from others the most rigorous performance of every duty which does not immediately clash with our own humour and disposition. From our own hearts, therefore, our blindness proceeds; we then only begin to dispute our obligations, when we begin to love the maxims which are in opposition to them.

3. But let us hasten to more convincing proofs of the evidence of the gospel. You say that the law is not so explicit on certain points as we pretend. Listen for a moment to the gospel itself. We might almost consent that, of all the duties it prescribes, you should consider those only as obligatory, which are expressed in such formal and precise terms that their meaning cannot be misunderstood: we might also say that we require no more, and acquit you of every other duty. These are its words: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."—*Luke*, xvi, 27. "Whosoever doth not renounce all things that he possesseth, cannot be my disciple."—*ib*, 33. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and those that use violence bear it away."—*Matt.*, xi, 12. "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: but he who doth the will of my Father, who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven."—*Matt.*, vii, 21. "Except you do penance you shall perish."—*Luke*, xiii, 5. "No man can serve two masters.....you cannot serve God and mammon."—*Matt.*, vi, 24. "Wo to you who laugh now, because ye shall mourn and weep. Blessed are ye who weep now, because you shall laugh."—*Luke*, vi, 25, 21. "If any one cometh to me, and hateth not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brother and sisters, and moreover his own soul, he cannot be my disciple."—*Luke*, xiv, 26. "You who are my disciples, shall mourn and weep, but the world shall rejoice: and you shall be sorrowful."—*John*, xvi, 20.

These, my friends, are the words of the gospel. These are its precepts. And surely they are sufficiently severe, without any additions from me. Ah! frail as I am, I myself stand in need of indulgence; and were I to consult my own weakness, and accommodate to it the doctrine which I preach, I should palliate instead of exaggerating: I should speak a language more consonant to the weakness of man: I should tell you, that God was too good to punish the gratification of the propensities which seem to be inherent in our nature, that it is not necessary to hate ourselves in order to love God, that the man who has wealth, is at liberty to enjoy it as he pleases, and refuse himself no indulgence. This would be my language: for when left to himself, a man must necessarily

speak this language of flesh and blood. But would you believe me? Would you respect my ministry? Would you reverence me, as an angel descended from Heaven, and commissioned to announce to you a new gospel?

4. Were the scriptures more frequently and more attentively perused by the faithful, the severity of the law of God would be fully understood, and every pretended doubt would be removed. But, alas! few can prevail upon themselves to devote half an hour to that sacred study; and those few seldom compare their own conduct with its maxims, or regulate their lives according to its precepts. The greater number of Christians spend their days in learning vain, frivolous sciences, and neglect the book of the gospels—the book which contains the science of salvation, the truths of redemption, and the consolations of our pilgrimage. Books are put into the hands of young people, in order to prepare them for the state of life which is designed for them; but the book which is to prepare them for that state which will continue for ever, is neglected and forgotten. Histories, romances, plays, etc. amuse their leisure hours; but the history of the wonders of God, and of his mercies to man, does not excite their curiosity.

This being the fact, it is not surprising that so many duties are neglected, so many doubts created; it is not surprising that the most common truths of the gospel are heard by the generality of Christians with as much astonishment as if we were describing the religious rites and ordinances of some foreign and unknown nation.

Yes, my brethren: if the doctrine of Jesus be as opposite to the spirit of these times as it was of the times when it was first preached, the reason is, because the book of the gospels is as much unknown to the Christians as it was to the pagans, or is read with as much indifference, and is laid down with as much distaste, as if it contained nothing to their purpose. If, therefore, you sincerely desire to be enlightened, take up the scriptures; read them with attention and submission; and you will soon acquire as perfect a knowledge of the extent of your duties, as your pastors themselves.

5. But supposing that the law of God were not so easy to be understood on all occasions as I have represented, what excuse could you collect from thence? That your guilt will be palliated by the plea of ignorance? Not at all. If men will continue to be in love with error in matters of such immense concern, and when they have so easy a remedy at hand, it can only be said that they must do it at their own peril. Never were the precepts of the gospel more ably

illustrated; never had ignorance less excuse. Learning is now generally diffused; and the pastor is fitted for his mission by devoting the finest part of his life to application and study.

But, were you incapable of ascertaining the truth by your own means, and were your pastors either too ignorant or too inattentive to give you the necessary information, you, nevertheless, have the examples of the saints before your eyes. A slight examination will disclose to you the path in which they all walked. You will perceive that they all forsook the path which the world calls so secure; that they all did penance; that they all crucified their flesh, and renounced the world, with its pleasures and customs. You will perceive that, although manners and maxims varied with the times, the manners and maxims of the saints were always the same, and that the saints of the last age resembled in everything the saints of the first. You will perceive that, in nations the most distinguished from each other, both by prejudices, interests, and dispositions—that in climes the most remote, and the most dissimilar to our own—that, in every tongue and in every tribe, the saints all resembled each other; and that, although some saved their souls in the state of opulence, others in poverty; some in the distraction of dignities and public employments, others in the silence of repose and solitude; some on a dunghill, others on a throne; they all walked in the way of the cross, of penance, and of self-denial.

With what reason, then, my beloved, can you flatter yourselves that you will be favoured by the Almighty, and conducted to Heaven by a different road? My God! how clearly dost thou manifest the truth to all who seek it! How effectually hast thou "convinced the world of sin, of justice, and of judgment!"

Why will you, therefore, oppose the triumph of grace in your souls? Why shut your eyes to that light which will fill you with consolation and joy? Since the mercies of God have not suffered you to become hardened in your sins, why repine at your happy lot? why "kick against the goad?" Be reconciled to the Lord, for by this means alone will you attain the peace and tranquillity which you seek. Turn to what side you please, you must come to this at last. The observance of the law is the true happiness of man. The gratifications of the passions increases your sorrow, and multiplies your chains: the law of God alone imparts contentment and liberty. For such is the nature of sinful man, that unless he resist his depraved inclinations, he will be wretched; and, unless he deny himself, he will neither enjoy true pleasure in

this world, nor partake of that eternal peace hereafter, which is reserved for those, and only for those, who love the law of God, and keep it.

XXXIII.—FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD.

"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."—*James*, i, 22.

Of all the duties of the Christian religion, not one, perhaps, is so much attended to as that of hearing the word of God. People of all ranks and denominations, rich and poor, Catholic and sectary, all are punctual in their attendance at sermons. The places of divine worship are crowded; public and private amusements are suspended, and all, with one accord, assemble like the Israelites round the mountain to listen to the great law of the gospel. The duration of ages has caused no diminution of zeal in this respect.

Would to God that from this solitary act of diligence I could proceed farther, and speak with admiration of the piety and good conduct of those who assemble together on those occasions. But, alas! notwithstanding this exterior attention to the word of God, never was it known to have less effect on the morals of mankind; never were instructions more frequent or more animated; and never was piety at a lower ebb.

It is not difficult to account for this regular and systematical compliance with this one particular duty, and this total abandonment of almost every other. Christians of even the most dissolute morals are convinced of the truths of religion; they believe that there is a heaven and a hell, and are well aware of the future destiny of those who live in the open contempt and violation of God's commandments. Terrified by the idea of giving up their souls for lost, they wish to keep up the appearance of religion, and to dispel the horrors of despair by the assurance that they have not renounced their faith and the hopes of salvation. This effect is produced by the easy, pleasing, and customary attendance at the public service; and as this is their only motive, so it is the only benefit they receive. They come neither with hearts prepared to hear the word of God with fruit, nor with the intention of regulating their conduct according to its precepts; and therefore they return as tepid, and as indifferent about the more essential duties of religion, as they were before.

But, my beloved brethren, "be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Vain is your attendance, if you do not endeavour to fulfil the words of the law which is delivered to you.

For your instruction on a subject of this importance, I will briefly describe the dispositions of mind with which you ought to receive the word of God, if you wish to derive any real advantage from it.

1. The first disposition is a sincere desire that the truths of salvation may be profitable to you. With this view, you ought to prostrate yourselves before God, and with fervent prayers to supplicate the Father of mercies that he would enlighten your understanding with his heavenly light, that he would give to his holy word that unction and energy which it possessed when it wrought the most wonderful conversions; that he would soften the hardness of your hearts, which have so long resisted the impressions of his grace; and that he would infuse into your souls that spirit of docility and obedience, which will cause you to receive the word with joy, and to bring forth fruit abundantly in due season. With this view, likewise, you ought to entreat the great Giver of all good gifts that he would shower down his graces on us his unworthy ministers; and that he would animate us with that zeal, that wisdom, that dignity, that fulness of his spirit, that powerful and persuasive eloquence, which is never exerted in vain, which seeks the salvation of men more than their applause, and which supplies for the want of abilities by the superabundance of piety and energy.

This ought to be your preparatory exercise. The Israelites were commanded by the Lord to prepare themselves by purifications and continence during the space of three days before they approached the mount from whence the law was to be proclaimed. And ought not you with greater reason to prepare yourselves before you come to hear the truths of the new law, the law of grace—a law as far surpassing in excellence the law of Sinai, as the substance surpasseth the shadow? The Israelites were awed into respect by the voice of a minister from Heaven, and by the thunder and lightning which accompanied his words. But are not we invested with the same power, and commissioned by the same authority as the angel; and although the ordinances we proclaim are not enforced by any marks of a visible judgment, are not the threats of eternal perdition, which we are commanded to fulminate against the unhappy prevaricators of the law, infinitely more terrible and more alarming? I say this: the light of faith displays before your eyes more powerful

motives for awe and respect when you hear the word of God, than any of those visible judgments which struck the hearts of the stiff-necked Jews, and compelled them to fall prostrate on the ground at the foot of the mountain.

To this preparation you ought to add the most lively sentiments of gratitude for the blessings which you enjoy in receiving the word of life from pastors whose authority has been transmitted to them in regular order and succession from the apostles.

The most dreadful punishment with which the Lord threatened to visit the sins of the impenitent Jews, was the depriving them of the benefit of his holy word. "They shall move," says he, by the mouth of his prophet, "they shall move from sea to sea, and from the north to the east; they shall go about seeking the word of the Lord, and shall not find it."—*Amos*, viii, 12. At length he executed his threats; and instead of raising up prophets in Israel as before, he permitted false teachers to seduce his people, and to preach to them gods unknown to any of their forefathers.

It is a singular effect of the divine mercies in your favour, that, notwithstanding the deluge of iniquity and falsehood which prevails, he continues to send amongst you pastors rightly ordained and lawfully commissioned. It is a particular mark of his providential care over you, that you have been preserved from the ways of error and schism; that you have been selected, in preference to so many thousands, to be his chosen generation, his purchased people, the inheritors of his true faith, and the partakers of his admirable light. Look around you: behold the multitudes to whom this blessing is denied: behold your relations, your friends, your acquaintance, who, by the inscrutable judgments of God, are suffered to receive the doctrine of error from the same pulpits from whence your ancestors received the words of truth, and to be led astray by means of that same docility and religious propension, which were originally intended to facilitate their discovery of the ways of life. Why, my beloved brethren, are not you involved in the same labyrinth of error? Why are you permitted to inhabit the land of Gessen, and to enjoy the bright light of Heaven, whilst the rest of your fellow-Christians are surrounded by the darkness of Egypt? It is the effect of the pure mercy of God alone that you are not of the assembly of those who glory in their schism; that you receive the doctrine of the apostles from the mouths of their legitimate successors; and that the waters of life and truth flow to you in a pure and unsullied stream.

And are you animated with a due sense of gratitude in

consideration of this great blessing, when you present yourselves to hear the word of God? Is it with a holy and devout affection that you acknowledge this unmerited interposition of God's singular benevolence, when you are so happy as to receive this inestimable favour? Do you exclaim with the royal prophet: "He hath not done in like manner to every nation, and his judgments he hath not made manifest to them?"—*Ps.*, cxlvii, 20. Alas! may it not be said that, instead of all this gratitude and love, the greater number of Christians are influenced only by custom and curiosity? The langour and indifference with which they are accustomed to listen to truths, which are avowedly the most clear and incontestible, and, at the same time, the most terrible and alarming of any that can be heard or thought of, are but too easily perceived: and when the attention is engaged of some, who are more regular than the rest, I call upon them to declare whether it is owing to the description of the vast disparity between their ways and the ways of the gospel, or not rather to the oratorical abilities of the person who delivers it?

Beloved Christians, be no longer the victims of tepidity and sloth. Prepare yourselves by prayer, and entertain a due sense of the blessing which you are going to receive from God; and after this preparation you will not fail to listen with that spirit of submission and respect which the sanctity of the law requires. This is the second consideration which I mean to treat upon.

2. The word which we announce is of divine authority. It is not our own gospel that we preach, but the gospel of Jesus. No sooner were we appointed to his ministry, than you were bound to respect us as envoys, commissioned to treat with you in his name about the great affair of your salvation. We carry, indeed, the treasure of his word in weak vessels; but it is neither less sublime nor less worthy of your attention on that account. Although, like the earthen vessels, which were the arms of Gideon against the City of Jericho, we return a harsh and disgusting sound, nevertheless, the truth (that concealed lamp, which the Almighty has fixed within us) is descended from Heaven; and, like the lamps of Gideon, is designed to strike terror into the hearts of unrepenting sinners.

To this divine word, therefore, it is your duty to attend with docility, and to attend, not as judges, but as disciples. Before this altar the precepts of the gospel, the laws of the Church are detailed: and they are detailed, not for your approbation or criticism, but for your instruction.

Is it with this spirit, my beloved, that you are animated? Do you come to the holy temple with a sincere resolution of regulating your conduct according to the maxims which will be delivered to you? Alas! how many are there who come with a predetermination to resist the truths of the gospel: who attribute our zeal to the effects of enthusiasm, and who coolly admire the vehemence of our harangues, as if it were nothing more than an attempt at declamatory eloquence! How many are there, who seem to think that the doctrine we preach is merely the doctrine of the pulpit, and not of the gospel; and that the duties we prescribe are only imaginary duties, and not the duties incumbent on every Christian! These people come to dispute with God, and to weaken the power of his word: they come to maintain the cause of the world and of their disorderly affections, in the holy place which was erected to be the inviolable asylum of truth and virtue.

But, my deluded brethren, if there are any of this description in this assembly, on what is your opinion founded? Are you sufficiently conversant with the scriptures to discover the exaggerations and forced conclusions of which you so boldly accuse us? Is it apparent that we adopt this style of eloquence either through interest or through any other temporal motive? Ah! my God, thou, perhaps, wilt hereafter declare that we weakened the power and destroyed the efficacy of thy holy word, because we did not meditate on it with sufficient leisure at the foot of the altar! Thou, perhaps, wilt hereafter rank us amongst the workers of iniquity, because the tepidity and irregularity of our lives deprived it of that holy unction and vehemence which it can receive only from the hallowed lips of the mortified and evangelical pastor!

But how can we add to the terrors of the gospel? Is it not sufficiently alarming of itself, without additions from us? Did St. Paul exaggerate, when he discoursed on justice, chastity, and the great judgment to come, and by the fire of his words struck terror into the heart of Festus, the idolatrous Roman governor? Did St. Paul exaggerate, when the thunders of his eloquence terrified the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities, and compelled them, as it were, to bring their lascivious and impious books, striking their breasts, and drowned in tears, and to make a sacrifice of them to the Lord?

You say that we exaggerate! But what motive could induce us to have recourse to such a disgraceful artifice? Are we, like the ancient philosophers, desirous of extending the circle of our disciples, by preaching a superior wisdom, or a more rigid morality than other people? No, beloved

brethren: you know the dispositions, you know the heart of the Christian pastor. You know that he would gladly lighten the yoke, instead of increasing its weight: and that he would willingly soften down every asperity in the paths of virtue, instead of creating imaginary obstacles. You know, that like the good shepherd in the gospel, he would take you on his shoulders, if possible, and carry you through the fatiguing wilds of the desert. You know this: you know that our only desire, our only solicitude is the salvation of your souls, and that, in compliance with our duty, we are always ready to alleviate your sufferings, and to stretch forth a helping hand to you in all your infirmities.

You have only to open the book of the gospels, and you will immediately discern the veil of discretion, which we draw over the severity of its maxims; you will be inclined to accuse us of introducing too many relaxations, out of regard to the weakness and imbecility of the times: you will say to yourselves what we are afraid to say, lest you should not be able to bear it; you will say: "Good God!—what!—carry my cross daily!—despise the world, and all it contains!—live like a stranger on the earth!—live for thee alone!—renounce every thing that flatters self-love—incessantly deny myself!—call those happy who mourn and are afflicted!—yes: this is thy holy law, and my salvation depends on the exact observance of it." What addition can be made by human ingenuity to the severity of this doctrine? What could we announce to you that would be more repugnant, or more formidable to self-love? Your censures, therefore, are unfounded: they are nothing more than the vain language of the world—a way of speaking, which no one examines, and which every one adopts—a language, which not one of you can assent to in private; for, when you candidly express your sentiments, you confess that we have not exceeded the truth, and that the gospel preaches more severely against the world and its admirers, than we who are so often condemned for the severity of our strictures.

Thus, my brethren, you see that, instead of exclaiming against the rigour of our doctrine, it is your duty to receive the word with docile and humble hearts, and to apply to yourselves the prohibitions and precepts which the true and indelible word of the gospel is known to inculcate. It is the duty of every individual to place, as it were, his soul before him; to examine her inclinations, with all her customary habits and failings, and to judge her according to the law, from which there can be no appeal or subterfuge whatever, and which is here definitively laid down as strictly obligatory

on all; and to ascertain whether she is defiled with the vices which it condemns, or whether she be adorned with the virtues in full perfection, which it recommends and enforces. It is the duty of every individual to be as attentive to the holy maxims, which are announced to all, as if they were addressed to him alone: to be as respectful and submissive as if Jesus himself were visibly present, and speaking to him: and to be as grateful, and as much affected, as if he were assured that we were sent for the express purpose of instructing him alone in the truths of salvation. This, my brethren, ought to be your invariable rule; and then the word of God would be a seed springing up in your souls unto life eternal.

But, alas! by whom is this rule observed? No one seems to be personally interested: no one appears to be conscious of the crimes against which we inveigh. One would think that we were preaching before an assembly of saints, free from weakness, free even from the appearance of sin: and that the sinner was an imaginary character, which we set up merely as an object to declaim against. The lascivious man does not condemn himself, even when we pass the severest sentence on the abettors of his favourite passion. The man who has amassed a treasure of ill-gotten wealth, readily subscribes to the condemnation of the extortioners and the unjust, but never includes himself in the number of the guilty. The master, the servant, the mechanic, exclaim against oppression, dishonesty, and fraud, when we discuss those subjects; but the same defects in themselves they palliate, either by the trite excuse of human weakness, or by the plea of custom and necessity. In a word, to view himself on the most favourable side, and to avoid a minute inspection into his whole character, seem to be the objects of every one's attention. As things are, it is in vain to point out, even in the clearest manner, who is the infringer of the law: his own portrait, though drawn out distinctly before him, and at full length, will not help him to a discovery. He sees no likeness at all in it; or at least, he pretends to descry some difference of shades in the colouring, and pleased with his sagacity and discernment, he hastily concludes that he is not the person it was intended for. Although the resemblance be correct and striking in the opinion of those around him, he alone either does not see it, or rashly attempts to trace a more correct resemblance in the features of his neighbour. Thus, the guilt of satirical and malignant applications is the only fruit which he reaps from our labours: he judges others unjustly, when he ought to pass sentence on himself. In this manner, O God, does the sinner reject every blessing: thus does the

light of truth close his eyes to his own defects, and open them to descry in the conduct of his neighbour either imaginary failings, or failings to which they ought to have been for ever shut.

Let not this, my beloved friends, be said of you. Enter seriously into yourselves, and endeavour to fulfil this important duty in the best manner possible. Prepare your souls beforehand to receive the seed of wisdom and justice; and be animated with the warmest sentiments of gratitude for the blessing which is so liberally bestowed upon you. Remember that the word which we announce is the word of God, and that its sanctity requires perfect docility and submission on your part. Remember, that it is your duty to apply to your own wounds the general remedies we prescribe, and to endeavour to reap every possible advantage from every discourse. It may not unfrequently happen that the preacher is unacquainted with the beauties of oratory, and the charms of delivery; but let your piety excuse every defect. Your primary object is the word of God: and the word of God is delivered to you by the imperfect speaker, as well as by the complete orator. Attend to the truth, and not to the arrangement of sentences. Be ye doers of the words, and not the listless admirers of eloquence. By these means you will acquire a perfect knowledge of your duties: you will be enabled by the grace of God to fulfil them: and you will be hereafter entitled to a participation of the promises which we here so imperfectly announce to you.

XXXIV.—THE ASCENSION.

ON THE DANGERS OF TEMPORAL PROSPERITY.

"They....asked him; Lord, wilt thou then at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?—*Acts*, i, 6.

It is astonishing, that the apostles, the pillars of the faith, the founders of the Church of all ages and nations, should be so little acquainted with the mysteries of Heaven, as to expect the restoration of the temporal kingdom of Israel, even at the very moment when our Lord was preparing to take his final departure hence, and enter into his glory. It is astonishing that, after they had witnessed the miracles, and heard the doctrine of their divine Master; after they had been repeatedly assured that his kingdom was not of this world; that they were to be poor and contemned; that the

world should laugh, but that they were to mourn and weep; it is astonishing, I say, that they should still be prepossessed with the idea of his manifestation being finally attended with earthly pomp and splendour, and that they should continue their solicitations for its speedy accomplishment even to the last moment of his visible existence on earth. "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

But the great mystery of man's redemption has been since developed, and the object of the incarnation has been fully manifested. We know that he came on earth to teach us, both by word and example, that the pleasures and riches of this world are unworthy of our affections: we know that he endured the death of the cross, to teach us that salvation is not be attained by a life of comfort and sensual enjoyments; and we know that he is now ascended into Heaven, in order to disengage our souls from the love of this perishable world, and to draw them thither after him.

This knowledge has been instilled into our minds from our earliest infancy. But what effect has it hitherto produced? What, in fact, are we the better for it? Do we not still continue, like the apostles, to sigh after earthly things? Ah! why will we not listen to the voice of truth, which assures us that riches, and honours, and pleasures, are more to be dreaded than courted; that, although the delusive charm of pomp and gaiety may seem to enliven the paths of this earthly pilgrimage, it is calculated only to divert our thoughts from our true country, to retard our progress towards it, and ultimately to prevent our arrival at it.

A few reflections on this subject, I hope, will contribute to soothe the cares and solicitudes of those whom God has placed in a state of poverty and affliction, and to raise the affections of those in affluence, from the dangerous objects of vanity and folly, to the more noble possessions of eternity.

The smiles of the world, says St. Augustine, are more dangerous than its frowns; its favours are more pernicious than its censures and contempt. This maxim is founded, first, on the extreme difficulty of avoiding irregularity and excess in the enjoyment of wealth; and secondly, on the innumerable and almost insurmountable obstacles which prosperity throws in the way of repentance.

1. Every Christian, according to the gospel, is required to live as a stranger on earth: his hopes, his crown, his inheritance, are in Heaven: his heart must be where his treasure is. If he intermit his sighs after this his true country, he ceases to belong to the world to come—to the Church of the first-born: if he be delighted with his exile, he is unworthy

of his high destiny. His piety is nothing, unless it be animated by the desire of enjoying God; his merit depends wholly on his most anxious and unremitting endeavours to prepare himself for that happy state; and his consolations ought to be no other than those which arise from a well-founded hope, that success will at length crown all his labours.

This is the essential character of a true Christian. Now, my brethren, in what state or condition of life is this character the most easily acquired—in the state of poverty, or in the state of affluence? It requires no very serious reflection, I should think, to be convinced that the poor and afflicted can easily refrain from loving what they cannot enjoy; that they may withdraw their affections without difficulty from a world which has never favoured them with its smiles; and that they can hardly consider themselves otherwise than as strangers in a place where they possess little or nothing, Yes: true it is that religion presents itself before them in the most engaging form: it becomes their sweetest occupation; it soothes their labours and alleviates their pains: it consoles them under all their privations and miseries, by the assurance that this world is not their true country; that nothing here is withheld from them but that which is not lawful for them to love; that the true wealth of a Christian is within—a treasure, indeed, which cannot be wrested from them against their will; that the loss of grace is the only real loss they can possibly sustain; that it is of little consequence whether they possess or be in want of those things which they cannot keep for ever; and that the most desirable condition on earth is the one which attaches them the least to a world which they are not permitted to love.

These sentiments naturally present themselves to the mind of the poor and afflicted disciple of Jesus. But it is not so with the affluent and the prosperous. For, let me ask, what inducements are there to compel the rich man to dislike a situation where all is pleasing? How can he live as a stranger in a land flowing with delights? What is there to induce him to turn away from the world, which lavishes its favours on him? What can deter him from fixing his tabernacle in a place where everything is so very commodious and inviting? Is it not almost repugnant to nature, that he should lament the length of his pilgrimage with the prophet, when he has nothing that is painful or burthensome to complain of? Is it not almost impossible that he should advance steadily on without stopping, towards his true country, when there are so many pleasing objects on the road to engage his

attention? Will he not be almost irresistibly inclined to rejoice, like the foolish man in the gospel, in the possession of his immense stores, to adopt a life of indolence and ease, and to say to his soul: "My soul thou hast goods for many years, take thy rest?" Yes, my beloved; both reason and experience prove, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that wealth attaches the mind to earthly things, and strongly induces the possessor to seek happiness in the enjoyment of creatures.

And where, I shall perhaps be asked, is the criminality of this disposition? I reply with St. Augustine, that its criminality is manifold and evident. The lovers of this world would gladly immortalise themselves on earth: they would not regret their eternal separation from God, provided they could enjoy, without satiety and disturbance, the pleasures of flesh and blood, and if they were permitted to choose between earth and Heaven, the present world and the world to come, the creature and the Creator, they would immediately declare in favour of the first. They are not even entitled to the name of Christian; for the Christian is a child of the promises, an inhabitant of a higher and much happier world, a citizen of Heaven, a portion of Christ. The Christian sighs incessantly for his union to that mystical body of which he is a member; whereas, on the contrary, the desires of worldlings are centred in the earth; the expectations of the just, the prospect of eternal happiness, excite not a pleasing thought in their breasts, when compared with the pleasure which is created by the prospect of any worldly enjoyment. I will not press this subject any farther. Enough has been said to convince you of the criminality of the dispositions above mentioned.

This, my beloved, is the first effect of temporal prosperity; an effect which exposes the salvation of the rich man to the greatest danger. Happy, therefore, are you among my present auditory, on whom the world does not smile. Be not grieved at your distresses and wants; but rather return thanks to God, who has placed you in this state of humiliation and suffering, in order that your affections may be withdrawn from a vain and perishable world, and fixed on him who on this day ascends to prepare a place for you in the mansions of eternal happiness.

Prosperity is likewise obnoxious to Christian piety in another respect: it contributes to the support of self-will, the most determined opposer and enemy of the will of God, The gospel tells us that we must hate ourselves in this world. or, in other words, that, as sin originates in the superiority which self-love gains in our affections over the love of

God, it is the duty of every Christian to watch the motions of his heart, and to guard against the encroachments of his irregular desires, as against the encroachments of an enemy.

This is a work of difficulty, even in the lowest state of life; but in the state of wealth and opulence, the difficulty is increased more than an hundred-fold. The rich man is empowered, and of course continually tempted, to gratify his corrupt inclinations. The inactivity of his life, and the want of that regular employment which is necessary for the well-being of our fallen nature, leave a vacuity in his mind—a vacuity which, unless it be filled up by works of piety and virtue, is an almost irresistible inducement to dissipation and thoughtless gaiety. This, as we unfortunately experience, is too generally the case. The chief resource of the rich man is pleasure. This is the main object of his life. His whole mind is bent on this one attainment. All his thoughts, all his desires, all his actions, are directed to this one point. By continual indulgence he contracts a fatal habit, which is soon formed into a second nature. In process of time, he is unable to make the least resistance to self-will: he can refuse no gratification to his irregular desires: he violates without scruple any of the known commandments of the Church that border upon the least restraint: and frequently the extravagant excess into which he is hurried, induces him to pay his own ungovernable will a tribute of homage and submission every way as great as any that the devout man is accustomed to pay the Lord of Glory.

This perhaps, may appear to border upon exaggeration. But, my beloved, in what does the devotion of the just man to God surpass the devotion of the worldling to himself? The one refers all his actions to God, the other refers all his actions to himself: the one lives only for God, the other lives only for himself; the one despises every thing in which God has no share, the other is indifferent about every thing in which his own interest or pleasure is not concerned; the one is indefatigable in his exertions to please God, the other is indefatigable in his exertions to please himself. The parallel might be continued; but this is sufficient to convince you that there is no exaggeration, and that *self* is as much the idol and divinity of the man of the world, as the Lord is the God of those who are his faithful servants. If temporal prosperity, therefore, be productive of such infinite evils, is it at all expedient for us that this should become the object of our desires and wishes? No: in a temper of mind better suited to the prospect that is before us, let us say: Blessed

are the poor and afflicted, because their distresses secure them from the pernicious effects produced by independence and ease.

2. In this manner does the light of faith display before our eyes the temptations and dangers which surround the possessors of wealth. I will now proceed to the second part of my subject, in which I will establish a point of still greater moment, namely, that the obstacles which are thrown in the way of repentance are much greater in a state of opulence, than any that are usually to be met with in a state of poverty.

In the first place, the rich man is not favoured with extraordinary graces so plentifully as the man who walks in the humble paths of life. You have only to open the sacred volume, and you will be instantly convinced of the truth of this position. In every page the Almighty has declared, both by word and example, that his delight is to be with the humble and the simple; that he turns away from the high and mighty; that he breaks the bow of the strong, and gives his strength to the weak; that he suffers the herb on the house top to wither and die, and does not favour it with the dews of Heaven on account of its exalted situation, while he clothes with beauty the lilies of the valley, although situated in the midst of brambles; that he breaks the cedars of Lebanon, which glory in their strength, while the tree planted by the water-side is made to bring forth its fruit in due season. This he particularly exemplified in the selection of his apostles; the noble and the wealthy he passed by unnoticed, and entrusted the most important commission that was ever given, to men the most illiterate and of the lowest extraction. I pretend not, however, to insinuate that there is any exception of persons with God; far from it. The treasures of his grace are open to all; no one is rejected who returns to him; and there have been examples of eminent sanctity on the throne as well as in the cottage.

But the order of Providence seems to require that there should be some compensation for the inequality of states and conditions among mankind; and that, in the confusion in which everything appears on earth—where the sinner is raised to honour, and the just man suffered for the most part to linger in poverty and affliction—there should be discernible to the eye of faith an overruling providence, and a wisdom of counsels on the part of God in the distribution of temporal blessings among his creatures. The awful secret of this divine compensation is, that the riches of grace are, as it were the portion and inheritance of the poor and afflicted, whilst

the prosperous man is suffered to enjoy undisturbed the things of the earth; or, in other words, that innocence, purity, uprightness, simplicity, and the fear of the Lord, are the virtues of the humble poor, whilst titles, dignities, and human grandeur are abandoned to the powerful and haughty possessors of earthly domains. In this manner is everything in the universe arranged with an economy worthy the great Author of nature. In this manner is the abundance of the one established with a view of administering relief to the necessities of the other; the rich are appointed to relieve the corporal wants of the poor; and the poor to succour the rich by their spiritual benedictions, and by the sacrifice of their prayers and sufferings.

In the second place, extraordinary graces are not imparted so liberally to the affluent, because it too frequently happens that temporal blessings are allotted to them by the great Judge as the only recompense due to the good works which they have performed. It is not uncommon for the sinner, by the mere influence of natural dispositions, to be oftentimes sincere, affable, guiltless in his speech, and equitable in his dealings, a good master, a tender husband, a faithful friend, and an enemy to injustice and oppression; but this is not sufficient; it is the Spirit that quickeneth and giveth life; and unless his works are animated by this Spirit of divine charity, he will not be entitled to an eternal recompense. Nevertheless, he performs good works; for by means of the virtues which he possesses, the peace of empires, the harmony of private families, the security of commercial dealings, and the very existence of civil society are maintained. I say he performs good works, and therefore he is entitled to a reward; for so exact are the scales of unerring justice, that no virtue can pass unrewarded, as on the other hand no vice can remain unpunished. But what is this reward? Alas! it is nothing more than a temporal reward; he was influenced only by temporal motives, and therefore a temporal recompense is all that he has a right to look for; he was ambitious only of worldly blessings, and therefore worldly blessings are awarded to him. But these rewards strike terror into the heart of the true believer, who considers them as marks of the privation of extraordinary grace, and as favours which God dispenses in his wrath.

I acknowledge, indeed, that this economy of divine Providence is not invariable; for it does occasionally happen that men whose lives were remarkable for true piety, are seen to enjoy peace in their strength, and abundance in their towers. (*Ps.*, cxxi, 7).

But these are only exceptions, and are consequently insufficient to inspire any one with confidence. You particularly, my brethren, if you make no other use of your prosperity than to promote the reign of sensual pleasure, to live in luxury and in the forgetfulness of God—you, I say, have reason to tremble, and, instead of indulging vain hopes, to address these words to yourselves: "Perhaps I am receiving my consolation in this world; this at least I know, that salvation is the affair which I have least of all been in the habit of attending to. I run on from sin to sin, and never seriously reflect on repentance and a change of life; I feel a solicitude for my friends, for my relatives, for my country; but for thee, my God, and for the eternal welfare of my soul, I feel the utmost indifference and unconcern. Oh! wouldst thou thus heap temporal blessings on me, and abandon me interiorly, were I of the number of the just? Chastise me rather on earth, and reserve for me those favours which will continue for ever. If riches are impediments to my salvation, take them from me; I would rather sit with Job on a dunghill than with Solomon on a throne, if my eternal welfare required it: that state I prefer which would draw me the nearest to thee."

The necessity, as well as the use, of entering into some such sentiments as these is clearly seen and clearly understood. These are matters which can escape none of us.

Again, the fountains of grace are opened with more reserve to the rich; because it too frequently happens that the state of affluence is not the state which the merciful designs of Providence had intended them for, but which he permitted them to attain to in compliance with their inordinate ambition. Instead of asking wisdom of the Lord, like Solomon, they were solicitous only for wealth. God saw the dispositions of their hearts, and in his wrath was propitious to their desires. But as a punishment for this unworthy preference of mammon before him, he leaves them to struggle with the dangers of a state which they had chosen for themselves, and, regardless of the manner in which they choose to proceed, seems not to interest himself in the final issue of their conflict.

Lastly, prosperity is an obstacle to repentance, on account of the present comforts and enjoyments which it imparts to the possessor. The man who is rich, and in want of nothing, is generally desirous of enjoying the good things which he has acquired. His attention, consequently, is diverted from the world to come; he has attained the summit of his wishes, and his solicitude for a long and peaceable possession of his wealth removes every solicitude about future happiness.

Nothing but crosses and afflictions can rouse such a man from his spiritual lethargy; he must experience the vanity and inconstancy of all earthly things before he will be induced to despise them; he never will fly for comfort and relief to the great Author of his existence, so long as he can extract sufficient enjoyment from creatures. Manasses did not turn to God until the horrors of a dungeon had made him enter into himself. The prodigal son did not return to his father until the severities of want had opened his eyes to behold the crime which he had committed against Heaven.

Such, my beloved, are the dangers which are usually attendant on a state of prosperity and opulence. Of all conditions in life this is by far the most perilous. It facilitates and encourages the indulgence of every passion, and it opposes almost insurmountable obstacles to sincere repentance.

Open your eyes, therefore, to the true nature of all that is present before you, and be convinced that wealth is not the proper object for the ambition of a soul that is truly Christian. Heaven alone is worthy of your solicitude; there is your treasure, and there let your affections be centred. Behold your ascending Jesus; follow him with the eyes of faith into the celestial mansions, and learn to place a just value on the glorious inheritance, the eternal kingdom which he has prepared for you. Instead of fixing your desires *on the restoration of the kingdom of Israel:* that is, worldly pomp and splendour, let it be the constant solicitude of the rich to lay up a store for themselves in the place where neither moth nor rust can consume, by alms-deeds to the poor; and let the poor console themselves with the assurance that God is ready to enrich them with the treasures of grace in proportion to their want of temporal blessings. Let both rich and poor be assured that the less consolation they receive in this world, the more they may reasonably expect to receive in the world to come; and that, on the bed of death, they would not exchange the merit which they shall have acquired by the patient endurance of affliction and pain, for the possession of all the crowns and sceptres in the world.

Meditate on these great truths, my Christian friends, and in whatever situation Providence has placed you, endeavour so to comply with all the various duties of your situation in the present life, as not to lose the benefit of them in the life to come.

XXXV.—SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE FERVOUR OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

"If any man speak, *let him speak* as the words of God: if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the power which God administered; that in all things God may be honoured through Jesus Christ."—1 *Peter*, iv, 11.

HAPPY, my beloved friends, were the times when maxims of the most sublime sanctity were eagerly embraced by persons of all ranks and conditions in the Christian Church, and nothing could equal the fervour of their inspired preachers, exhorting them to the truest holiness, but the zeal and alacrity of those who heard them. Then was Christian piety known and sought after; then did fervour and charity abound; then was the Church an assembly of saints; then the apostle commanded and was obeyed; then "if any man spoke, he spoke as the words of God; if he ministered, he ministered as of the power which God administereth; and in all things was God honoured through Jesus Christ."

But those happy times are no more. The spirit of tepidity and languor has pervaded the whole Christian world; hardly is there a trace of primitive fervour to be found. How alarming is the comparison between the former and the present times!—how justly may we fear that the days are approaching when faith will with difficulty be found on earth! The subject, however, is pleasing. We love to hear the virtues of our forefathers rehearsed; and we readily applaud and commend their piety, although our applauses and commendations involve a tacit condemnation of ourselves. We will, therefore, take a retrospective view of the state of Christian discipline in the first ages of the Church; and I hope that the display of the penitential piety of our ancestors will animate your zeal, and induce you to labour in earnest like them in the great cause of God, and of your own souls.

The origin of the Catholic Church bears no resemblance to the origin of the churches of error and schism. The rise and progress of these were, without exception, attended with degrading and dishonourable circumstances. Pride and libertinism were the primary motives of the establishment of them all; and, on that account, their disciples draw a veil over the times that presided over their birth, in order to conceal the passions which produced their existence, and which fostered and supported them in their infant years. Like the dishonoured offspring of illegal connection, they are

confused and abashed when we remind them of their extraction.

But we, my beloved, we can say with confidence: "Recal to mind the former days."—*Heb.*, x, 32. The commencement of the Catholic Church was the period of her greatest fervour and piety.

Recal to mind, therefore, those days when the Church, adorned with the first fruits of the Holy Spirit, appeared without spot or wrinkle. Under a mean and sorrowful exterior, she shone with a splendour at once heavenly and divine. Sufferings and reproaches were the ornaments of her dignity: and, although trodden under foot by persecutors, she was a spectacle worthy both of angels and men.

Recal to mind those happy days when the Church was one great assembly of saints: when the weaker sex were superior to the united powers of earth and hell: and when religion formed, out of the lowest and most illiterate of mankind, wise men and heroes whom philosophy had never equalled in the schools of Greece and Rome.

Recal to mind that primitive fervour when innocence of morals was the crime, if the expression may be allowed, by which the Christian was distinguished: and when nonconformity to the maxims of a corrupt world, and aversion to public amusements, were the marks by which he was discovered, and the causes of his being denounced before the tribunal of a persecuting tyrant.

Recal to mind that severe discipline which subjected public transgressors to public chastisements: when the scandal of the offence was effaced by the display of the repentance: when long and severe works of expiation were embraced as an indulgence: when sinners solicited as a favour the most rigorous penance: when, prostrate in the porch of the temple, covered with sackcloth and ashes, and secluded from the presence of the holy altar, they spent years in the exercises of humiliation and suffering, and at length received the kiss of peace and reconciliation, not as the reward due to their penitential austerities, but as the effect of the tender mercy and clemency of the Church in their favour.

The recollection of those happy times—the view of the immense dissimilarity between our forefathers and ourselves, between their fervour and our tepidity, between the innocence of their lives and the depravity of ours, between their austerities and our sensualities, between the tears and severities of their repentance and the cold and languid process of ours, are more than sufficient motives to strike terror into our souls, and to make us tremble for our salvation.

The Church, it is true, no longer exacts the same long and public proofs of repentance, before she admits her children to the sacrament of reconciliation. External discipline has changed in this respect; for, the number of sinners increasing with the number of believers, it was impossible to separate them all from the society of their brothers, and subject them to public penance. Alas! were we now to exclude from the holy mysteries the unclean, the fornicators, the adulterers, the profane swearers, the detractors, and the other sinners who were formerly subjected to canonical penance, where would be the assembly of the saints?

But the change that has taken place is only in the external polity of the Church: the spirit of her laws is still the same as formerly. Although the fervour of the faithful has relaxed—although the multitude of the guilty has rendered the duration and publicity of penance impracticable—although prudence has dictated a mitigation of the discipline which primitive zeal had established, the eternal law of God is fixed and immutable: the obligation of severe penance is inseparable from the gospel: it is appointed for all times and places: and the relaxation of morals, so far from lessening the necessity, renders the observance more indispensable.

Whether, therefore, the canonical laws of the Church are in force or not, the laws of God continue to exact as severe a course of atonement for sin as they did in former times. Even the innocent and undefiled are not exempted from the obligation of penance. Every Christian is required to crucify his flesh, with its vices and concupiscences: every Christian is bound to deny himself without ceasing, to carry his cross daily, to pluck out the eye which scandalizeth him, and to take Heaven by violence.

The mere title of Christian imposes this penance even on the guiltless disciple. But we, my beloved, we are not of this number: we are sinners: and consequently we are bound not only to offer violence to ourselves, and to crucify our flesh, but to expiate past crimes—to humble ourselves in the dust at the feet of an injured God—to root out inveterate habits: in a word, to submit to all the severities of penance which the law exacts from sinners. These are ordinances, which times, manners, and customs can neither change nor make obsolete.

Now, my brethren, have your lives been hitherto regulated according to the maxims of this immutable law? Do you perform even the penance that is required of the innocent? Do you live conformable to the gospel, as becomes the disciples of a crucified Saviour? Do you renounce sensual

pleasures? Do you mourn? Do you receive afflictions with thanksgiving? Are you meek and humble of heart? Do you bear in your bodies the mortification of Christ Jesus? Do you hate the world? Do you fly from its allurements? Do you watch and pray continually? This is the penance of the innocent. Without this conformity to the gospel, were you more chaste than Susanna, more irreprehensible than Judith, more charitable than Cornelius, you would be lost.

But, alas! you are neither chaste, nor irreprehensible, nor temperate. You owe to the divine justice the sum of ten thousand talents. You have incurred the obligation of expiating criminal and shameful pleasures, of removing scandals, and of purifying your consciences from their defilements. Your penance, consequently, must be of far greater extent than the penance above described. But what is this penance, perhaps you will say?

Ah! were you desirous and capable of proportioning your penance to the justice of God, this should be my answer: contemplate the sanctity and the majesty of Him whom you have offended; fix your eyes on the terrible judgments which he formerly inflicted on people whose crimes, perhaps, were not more enormous than yours—the whole universe overwhelmed by the waters of the deluge—Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by fire from Heaven—the discontented Israelites swallowed up alive — a simple violation of the Sabbath punished with death—Moses himself excluded from the land of promise on account of a momentary act of diffidence—the Great Victim of propitiation, the Lamb of God, "in whom he was well pleased," suffering unutterable torments, in order to effect our reconciliation: consider all this, I would say, and proportionate your penance accordingly.

But were I to insist upon this, I should dishearten you, because I should advise a course of penance which far exceeded the powers of mortal man. I will, therefore, allow that a milder course, one more compatible with the weakness of your nature, may be sufficient to effect your reconciliation. But what is this milder course? No other than that which was followed by the illustrious penitents of former ages. They spent whole years in humiliations and prayer: the Church imposed on them fasts, austerities, and privations of the most painful nature. Your sins, probably, are not inferior to theirs; your course of atonement, consequently, must not be less severe.

I acknowledge, indeed, as I said above, that the Church has long ceased to exact these public testimonies of repen-

tance. But severe penance is not less indispensable on that account. Necessity has obliged her to relax in the severity of exterior discipline; but her spirit is still the same. She declares that you are bound to impose on yourselves proportionate mortifications in private: and although she allows you to be your own judges, she admonishes you that it is your duty to judge yourselves now as you will be judged hereafter.

This, dear Christians, is consonant with reason. For, why should these times be more favourable to the sinner than the primitive times? Why should less penance be necessary for you than it was for the first Christians? Does the justice of God require less? No: in God there is no change, nor shadow of alteration; all changes around him but he is always the same. Are your crimes less enormous than the crimes of the primitive Christians? Alas! they were strangers to the defilements which you contract without scruple: they frequently did public penance for a single fault: and can you suppose that, after a life spent in iniquity and sin, you are more entitled than they were to a mitigation of atonement? Were crimes less excusable in the first Christians, and on that account deserving of greater punishment? Far otherwise: the state of idolatry in which they were born—the immoralities of paganism in which they were educated—the excesses authorized by the religion which they had hitherto professed, tended to extenuate the guilt of those faults into which they fell after their conversion. You, on the contrary, you were washed in the laver of baptism in your early infancy: you were educated in the holy discipline of self-denial: you were confirmed in the horror of sin, both by instruction and example. Your crimes, therefore, are more offensive to God, because they are attended with greater ingratitude. Can any excuse be alleged from the prevalence of wickedness in these latter times? Ah! the multitude of the guilty neither changes the nature of sin, nor restrains the arm of the Almighty. The whole race of mankind, in the days of Noah, were destroyed by the deluge, no less than the unhappy Achan, who, in the capture of Jericho, was the only one accursed in Israel.

Can it be said that the fervour of the primitive times encouraged the faithful to submit to the rigours of penance, but that, the difficulties being now increased by the universal decay of piety, less is expected from you? What, my beloved, do you imagine that more was required from the first Christians because they were fervent and zealous, and that less is required of you, because you are tepid and indifferent?

If this were truth, the compunction of those good men would have been their misfortune, since it would have subjected them to greater punishment; and our slothful tepidity would be a blessing, since it would diminish the labours of penitential atonement. But who will subscribe to such an assertion!

No: my beloved brethren, be not deceived, religion never changes. The spirit of the Church is invariably the same. The hatred which God bears to sin is never diminished: his justice always exacts the same reparation. The gospel never alters; and although times and customs change, the duties of a Christian never can. The path of life was narrow in the first ages; it will, consequently, never be broad and commodious: the kingdom of Heaven suffered violence in those times; it will, consequently, never be attainable by a life of pleasure and delight: the Lord exacted the last farthing, that is, the most severe temporal expiation from the primitive Christian; consequently he will not forgive the whole debt to the Christian of the present age.

This, my brethren, is the spirit of the gospel: this is a truth which will continue for ever. Where, then, are your tears, your austerities, your fasts, your self-denials, your perseverance in prayer? Where is that spirit of compunction and humiliation, which imprints on every action the seal of penance? What sufferings do you impose on yourselves? What do you do, in order to be entitled to the name of penitent—the only title on which you can pretend to salvation?

But what do I say? so far from being penitents, I fear that many are not entitled to the name of Christians. Would you have no reason to dread the justice of God, supposing that you had only the common duties of the gospel to fulfil, without any sins to atone for? Alas! what a life of dissipation and thoughtlessness is led by the generality of those who profess to be disciples of the gospel? Ah! never were luxury, depravation of morals, indifference about the things of God, and solicitude for the things of the world, more universal nor more unbounded: never were the paths of life so unfrequented, nor the numbers of the just so small. Select, if you please, from amongst your acquaintance the men of the greatest piety, the men who are canonized by the world, the women who are applauded by the multitude, the elect of the age, says St. Augustine, whose exterior deportment is irreproachable; and examine whether you can discover even the traces of primitive sanctity in their lives—whether you can discern one of those features, the full assemblage of which is required to form the likeness of the true Christian—

whether you can distinguish in their persons disciples of Jesus, children of faith, citizens of Heaven, enemies of the world, crucified men, strangers on earth: look around your acquaintance, and tell we whether amongst them all you can discover one who fulfils all the duties of a Christian. I speak to men of every rank and profession in life.

Thus, beloved friends, our obligations are the same as they were in the first ages, and manners and customs alone are changed. Religion subsists to be our judge, but the faith which is to save us is extinct. The gospel has descended to us, to be the subject of our condemnation, after it had been the rule of faith to our forefathers. The body of Christianity exists, but the spirit which animated it is banished from our hearts. We are distinguished from the infidels, but our only distinction is this: that having sprung from a holy root, we are become wild branches, and have engrafted on the good olive the bud of infidelity and the corrupted ways of the pagan and idolater.

Be not deceived, therefore, my beloved, by the idea that the present degenerate state of piety will excuse impenitence. Fix your eyes solely on the duties prescribed in the gospel, and be convinced, that unless your lives are strictly regulated according to them, you will be condemned, although your justice were to exceed, not only that of the Pharisee, but of all mankind put together.

You among my present hearers who have renounced your former ways, and entered the paths of piety and salvation, compare the feeble efforts of your repentance with the zeal and austerities of the primitive penitents. So far from being flattered by the view of your defective virtues, which perhaps appear great and singular in this corrupted age, be rather humbled and confused at the sight of the immense way you have yet to go before you come up to the fervour and piety of former times. Your virtues, I acknowledge, exceed those of the generality of mankind; but the difference between you and the primitive Christian is as great as the difference between the worldling and you.

May the sinner therefore tremble, and may the just man be animated: may the one be awakened from his lethargy, and may the other be renewed as the eagle in his strength: may the one view his state with dismay, and may the other not look with complacency on himself: may the one be alarmed at the sight of his irregularities, and may the other rely not too securely on his virtues. By these means we may be all united together hereafter, and sing in concert the praises of the Deity in the choirs of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

XXXVI.—WHIT SUNDAY.

ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD.

"We have received not the spirit of this world, but the spirit which is of God."—1 *Cor.*, ii, 12.

The Spirit of God and the spirit of the world have ever been, and ever will be essentially at variance. Their empire may be said to be divided into two great cities—Jerusalem and Babylon; the inhabitants of which, having little or nothing in common between them, differ in all their laws, manners, usages, and customs. Thus, the power of these two opposing spirits is extended over all the inhabitants of the universe; they divide all mankind between them; and their respective subjects are all known and characterised by their distinctive marks in the sight of God.

You who compose this assembly belong to one of the two: you are citizens either of Jerusalem or Babylon: you are animated either by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of the world: you are either heirs of the promises or children of wrath. It is impossible you should belong to both at one and the same time: and it is equally impossible that you should not belong to one or other of them. Either the world or God must have dominion over your hearts: no axiom on earth can be plainer than this, for the heart of man cannot be divided; to the one or other of these two masters it must and will necessarily belong.

We are invited by the Church on this day to look into the state of our souls, and to examine whether we live by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of the world. Many people deceive themselves on this point: the external observance of religious duties, the use which is commonly made of the sacraments at stated times, and the habit of living within certain bounds, which are thought sufficient to preserve them from the commission of any mortal offences: these, and such like practices, inspire the tepid with such confidence, that they are ready to conclude that all is right, and that their portion in Heaven is perfectly secure, although at the same time their hearts are worldly and dissipated, and spiritually dead in the sight of God.

In order that you may be enabled to judge yourselves by the rule of the gospel, I will trace the distinctive characters which the scriptures affix to those two opposing spirits: and

I hope that, after a candid examination, it will appear that you are not only warranted in thinking yourselves secure, but that you will be able to say, with the confidence of the apostles, and in the words of my text, that you have indeed received, "not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God."

1. The first sure mark, or characteristic token of the Spirit of God abiding in the soul, is a love of recollection, prayer, and retirement. The apostles were no sooner filled with the Holy Ghost, than they renounced all other occupations in order to devote themselves entirely to the ministry of the gospel, and prayer. Previous to this they had not been able to watch one hour with Jesus; they knew not how to pray; they had never asked of the Father anything in the name of their divine Master: but after the Spirit had descended, and taken possession of their hearts, they persevered in prayer; they frequented the temple at stated times of the day, and there they poured forth their souls in fervent supplications to the Lord. When persecuted by the Jews, prayer was their sweetest consolation. When condemned to the horrors of a prison, they made the dismal abode resound with their canticles of thanksgiving and praise. When the chains of Peter spread consternation over the flock, they had recourse to prayer; and to their fervent and continuous supplications was the Church indebted for the miraculous deliverance of her chief pastor. In a word, from being carnal, dissipated, worldly men, averse to recollection and restraint, they at once became men of prayer; they were endowed with interior spiritual wisdom; they fixed their conversation in Heaven; and they were as intent on serving the Lord, and they extolled his wonders and benefits with as great freedom in the midst of Jerusalem, as formerly when they contemplated his glories on the mountain of Galilee.

This is the first change which is wrought by the descent of the Spirit of God. No sooner does he take possession of the seat in our hearts which had been occupied by the world, than he works a complete revolution in our desires and inclinations; he throws a gloom over the objects which before appeared so charming and attractive; he creates a disgust for those pleasures which had hitherto been our delight; he introduces into our souls the God of peace and consolation, to whom we had hitherto refused admittance; and by his enlivening presence, he changes our interior into the sweetest paradise of delights.

Yes, my beloved, the newly reformed Christian, instead of depending on the society of men or on exterior objects for

amusement, is abundantly supplied with every pleasure from his own breast; he there finds his God—in his company alone he is happy. In the midst of dissipation, and in the hurry of business, he incessantly recals his wandering thoughts to his interior: in the midst of domestic solicitudes, and the cares of a busy world, he forms as it were a private solitude in his heart, and there he entertains himself with his Lord; there he piously laments the sad necessity which obliges him to mix in temporal things, and interrupt his meditations; there he endeavours by acts of love and gratitude to make some atonement for the many crimes which are committed in his presence; there, in a word, he lives and resides more constantly than in the dissipations in which he is exteriorly engaged, but from which his heart is estranged.

Thus, in the words of St. Paul, the Christian is a spiritual and interior man. His whole life is directed by the influence of the Holy Spirit which resides within him. His most ordinary actions are sanctified by religion. Whether he eats or drinks, mourns or rejoices—whether he is in opulence or indigence, in health or sickness, pious reflections occur to his mind, and compel him to pour forth his soul before God in acts of submission and love. The transactions and vicissitudes of the world, the revolutions of states and empires, the fall and elevation of families, the prosperity and misery of the times, the licentiousness or the reform of public morals, the defection of the just or the conversion of sinners, the overthrow or the reign of truth in kingdoms—in short, all the changes and varieties which are witnessed in this world, and which rekindle in worldly souls the love of vanity, and inflame their ardour for the enjoyment of flesh and blood, are all so many instructive lessons to the man who is filled and animated by the Spirit of God. They all remind him of the truths of religion; they display in a new light the vanity of all created things, and the importance of eternity. The whole world is like an open book, in which he continually reads the wonders of God, and discovers proofs of the extreme blindness of almost all mankind.

Sometimes, perhaps, he may be taken by surprise, and, seduced by the allurements of external objects, be hurried down the torrent for a few moments: sometimes, perhaps, through temporary inattention, his piety may yield to the influence of public maxims and examples; sometimes, perhaps, the dissipations of the world may gain an ascendancy over him, and turn away his thoughts from the God who is present within him: for human weakness is inseparable from the nature of man during his mortal existence. But these

are involuntary failings—momentary deviations. He is immediately reproved for his sin by the Holy Spirit; he collects his wandering thoughts without delay: he enters into himself; he falls prostrate before the altar of God; he endeavours to satisfy his injured justice by sincere compunction; and he humbly acknowledges in his sight, that the more the pleasures of the world are indulged, the more is to be seen of the emptiness and vanity which belong to them, and that no true enjoyment can be found in any created thing at a distance from God.

This, my beloved, is the life of recollection and prayer, which testifies that the soul is animated by the Spirit of God. This is the interior and spiritual life which distinguishes the lovers of Jesus from the lovers of the world. This is the essential characteristic of Christian piety.

The above description is not imaginary; it is taken from the word of God. According to this unerring authority, the just man lives by faith; his conversation is in Heaven; his only delight is in the things above; he uses the world as if he used it not; he considers it as nothing better than a shadow which passeth away; he turns away his eyes from visible things, and fixes them as intently on those that are invisible as if they were actually displayed before him; he forms his judgment of the value of those objects which attract the esteem of men, not from external appearances, but from the concealed testimonies of truth; he is a stranger and a traveller on earth; he is a citizen of the world to come; he advances towards his true country steadily and without ceasing; he refers all his actions and all his desires to that happy termination of his exile; and he despises all that passes with time, and that will not continue with him for ever, as things unworthy of his affections.

In these terms do the scriptures speak of the just man who is animated and directed by the Spirit of God. In fact, my beloved, what other description could have been given? If the Spirit of God exercise supreme dominion over the soul, he must necessarily regulate her desires, withdraw her affections from unlawful objects, and free her from the servitude of her passions: the soul must necessarily be dependant on him; she must see, as it were, with his eyes; act according to his impressions; seek only after spiritual things, and show forth in her own conduct the life of Jesus. In the same manner as the body is subject to the soul which animates it, must the soul be subject to the Holy Spirit, and be directed in every thing by his inspirations.

2. Now, my beloved, let me exhort you to judge yourselves

according to these rules. Do you discover in your souls this first indubitable token of the Spirit of God? Is it by him, or by the spirit of the world that you are influenced and directed in your desires and inclinations, in your projects and hopes, in your joys and griefs, in your thoughts and actions? I do not ask whether or not the world has too much power over you at times; at times, I know it has; for, alas! where is the man who, in the midst of the perils which surround him on every side, is not sometimes liable to be drawn aside by some or other of its fascinating allurements? But I ask, whether it is the Spirit of God, or the spirit of the world, which may most properly be said to be the grand moving and governing principle that is known to preside over the general system of your conduct?

This is my question; and I ask it, not that I wish for any information on my own account; my only motive for asking it is to put you in mind of the urgent necessity which all are under in this weighty particular of looking narrowly to themselves. For my own part, comparing the ways of men with the severe rules of the gospel, I have no hesitation in declaring, that it is by no means improbable but the greater number of us who are here assembled, not excepting those who are exteriorly regular in their duties, are chiefly under the influence of the spirit of the world, that we are consequently strangers to the Spirit of God, and that we do not live in a manner that will insure to us the possession of the eternal promises. I will state my reasons, and submit them to your examination.

In the first place, we never enter seriously into ourselves. Our time, perhaps, is properly spent in the ordinary duties of our state of life; we, perhaps, are attentive to our domestic affairs, and sedulously provide for the present and future welfare of those who are entrusted to us; we, perhaps, are scrupulous in our dealings, and offend in nothing against our neighbours: all this, perhaps, we do, and we are certainly entitled to some degree of merit on that account. But none of these duties recal our wandering thoughts, and fix them upon God; none of them induce us to look into the state of our interior. Our minds are still as dissipated as ever, and we are as much strangers to ourselves as if we did not perform any of them. Even the works of piety are insufficient to fix our attention; our hearts are occupied with the world at the time that our knees are bent before the veil of the sanctuary; our thoughts are wandering on a thousand impertinent objects, at the time that our lips are employed in reciting canticles of adoration and praise; our imaginations

are running after airy phantoms and delusive dreams, at the time that we attempt to meditate on the truths of salvation; in a word, at the time that our deportment is regular and irreproachable in the eyes of men, we fly away, as it were, from ourselves; and, instead of devoting our leisure time to recollection, and the enjoyment of God in the interior of our souls, we dread to be left in solitude even for one hour, and we hasten away to society as the only source of enjoyment after the fatigues and solicitudes of the day are concluded. This, my beloved, too plainly indicates that the Spirit of God does not reside within us. For the soul that is enlivened by his divine presence is delighted with solitude; she courts retirement in order to enjoy the society of the God of consolation; her only pleasure is to converse with Jesus in her interior; she sedulously avoids every occupation or amusement that distracts her thoughts and diverts her attention from him. These are her pleasures, and these would be our pleasures likewise were we possessed by the Spirit of God. As long, therefore, as our thoughts are hurried away by restless desires, ambitious projects, and anxious solicitudes; as long as we are obliged to fly to company for amusement in order to dispel the gloom which solitude has created, so long must we conclude that our souls are deprived of the enlivening presence of God, and that the spirit by which we are animated is no other than the spirit of the world.

In the second place, I say that we are influenced by the spirit of the world, not only because we are averse to recollection and retirement, but likewise because our desires, our affections, our opinions, and our actions, are all under the guidance of that same spirit. With respect to every object that surrounds us, in relation to every event that either excites our astonishment or affects our feelings, we think like the world, we judge like the world, and we act like the world. We are dejected by afflictions, and elated by prosperity; we are mortified and humbled by reproaches and contempt; and we are flattered and delighted by honours and respect. Those that succeed in the world we call happy; and those that fail, wretched and miserable. We envy the good fortune of our superiors; we are jealous of the rising merit of our equals; and we look down with supercilious contempt on that state of life which is inferior to our own. We admire the talents which the world admires; we are dazzled by the splendour of high birth, opulence, and titles; and we pride ourselves on every superiority which Providence has given to us above others. In a word, our desires, our hopes, our expectations, our fears, are all excited by the world. We

may perhaps, in conversation, speak of the world with contempt; but in our conduct we are influenced solely by the world. We may perhaps, on occasions, be guided by Christian motives, consult the honour and glory of God in our determinations, be submissive on trying occasions to the will of Heaven, and be animated by sentiments of true piety: but we act in this Christian manner only now and then; it is not a regular undertaking, a systematical mode of conduct; it is nothing more than a faint gleam of religion which continues only for a moment—an interruption only of the general tenor of our lives. The primary and universal principle both of our thoughts and actions, is the spirit of the world, and nothing better. Now, where the spirit of the world reigns, there the Spirit of God is not. We may, perhaps, hear his voice inviting us to return to him; we may, perhaps, be favoured with holy inspirations and pious desires; but this does not constitute him king over our hearts. He knocks at the door, but he has not entered the house; he permits some few rays of his love to fall upon the soul, but it cannot be said that he has as yet favoured her with his presence, or that, as long as this continues to be her condition, he will ever descend there in person.

If this be the description of our state, then what are we to say? One thing only, and this is, that we belong to the world; that we are animated by the spirit of the world; and that, although we have the appearance of life, we do, indeed, remain in death. This is a subject which never enters into our examination. We form a judgment of ourselves from our exterior deportment, which is irreprehensible, and from the regular performance of works which are esteemed by men, and applauded as if they constituted the very essence of piety; but we never ask ourselves this question: "By which spirit am I animated and directed in the ordinary occurrences of life—by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of the world? What are my desires and my fears, my hopes and my solicitudes, my joys and my sorrows, my attachments and my dislikes, my principal aim and object through life? are they not all similar to those of the world? If so, the Spirit of God has no part in me: I am wholly under the influence of the spirit of the world; and if I do not reform, I shall perish together with it; for the world is already judged." No opinion that you can form can be truer or better founded than this.

But there are still grounds to hope for better things. Enter seriously on the important task of self-examination. Invoke the assistance of the Holy Ghost: be instant in your suppli-

cations to him; and if you discover that you do not possess him, give yourselves no rest until you are assured that he is descended into your souls, and by this enlivening presence has produced a perfect change in your affections and desires. By these means only will you expel the spirit of the world, and make yourselves acceptable to him, who on this day descended to take possession of all hearts, and to make them his own for ever.

XXXVII.—WHIT MONDAY.

ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD.

"We have received not this spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.—1 *Cor.*, ii, 12.

THE importance of the subject which formed the substance of my last discourse, induces me to submit it again to your consideration, in order that you may be fully enabled to examine the state of your souls at this holy time, and impartially decide whether you have received the Spirit of God, or whether you are still enslaved to the spirit of the world. I have already stated that the soul in which the Holy Spirit resides, is replenished with such interior delights, that she desires no other happiness than to enjoy the society of God in her own interior by a spirit of recollection and prayer; and that she regulates all her thoughts, words, and actions in strict conformity with his holy law. I will now resume the thread of my discourse, and describe the other characteristic marks of the Spirit of God abiding intimately within us.

1. In the first place, this pure and divine Spirit is no sooner descended into the soul, than he draws back the veil which had hitherto concealed from inspection the extent of her irregularities. He introduces her, as it were, into her own interior: he displays in a clear light the crimes of her past life: he discovers numberless passions and frailties, which the dissipation of a worldly life had prevented her from beholding: he unfolds all the corruption and pride of her heart, and the opposition which she experiences within herself to the rules of the gospel: he uncovers all the wounds which have been caused by the world and self-love: and he convinces her that the will, the mind, the imagination, the senses, the flesh, are all disordered, and leagued together against justice, sanctity, and truth.

The discovery of this secret and universal derangement of

all the faculties of the soul necessarily produces a two-fold effect on the mind of the repenting sinner. It inspires him with the resolution of reforming every abuse by a constant, vigilant attention over all his actions; and of satisfying the justice of God for the past, by a course of mortification and penance, voluntarily entered upon, and resolutely sustained through every trial or encounter that may possibly happen to him in future.

These are the effects which are produced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The graces which he infuses cannot remain inactive: they stimulate the soul to exertion, and cause her to adopt the means which will the most speedily break the chains of her captivity, and set her at perfect liberty. The Spirit breathes wheresoever he will, and the truths which he teaches are sure to captivate; for the heart which he enlightens is ever open to conviction, being reformed, as the apostle expresses it, in the newness of spirit. The worldling, I acknowledge, is sometimes enabled to behold the error of his ways and the corruption of his heart: he sometimes is induced to enter into himself, and take a view of his interior. But his inducement is not the love of truth, but the desire of regaining the peace of mind which he had lost. Self-love is his only reprover; and therefore, although he conceives a hatred against the evils which his sins entail upon him, he is not in love with the remedy—mortification and penance.

But the man who is enlightened by the Spirit of God is actuated by other motives. It is sin that he detests: it is the honour of his Maker that he loves: and, therefore, he scrutinizes every action and inclination; he estimates the influence which self-love and the world exercise over him; and he is animated with redoubled zeal in his endeavours to correct every irregularity, and to apply the remedy to every disorder.

Thus, if on his examination he discovers that his heart is corrupted with pride, and that to this cause must be attributed his dread of humiliation and disgrace, he endeavours by repeated acts of humility to conquer this unhappy passion. If he is addicted to antipathies and hatred, he offers violence to himself, and on every occasion gives testimony of his kindness and good will to the object of his dislike: if he experiences within himself an inordinate love of dissipation and pleasure, he seeks to counteract it by recollection and retirement: if he is inclined to indulge in the frivolous ornaments of dress and vanity, he resists his inclinations, and confines himself within the bounds of modest simplicity and

decorum: if he feels an aversion to the duties of religion, he forces himself to practise supernumerary works of piety, in order to conquer his repugnance by exceeding the severities of the law.

These are the self-denials, these are the conflicts by which the truly reformed sinner endeavours to reduce the rebellious powers of his soul into subjection to the will of God. He is like an inexorable judge; he listens neither to excuses nor palliations: he attacks every passion indiscriminately: if success does not immediately crown his labours, he is not discouraged, but throws himself at the feet of God, and humbly solicits an increase of grace: he entertains a sincere aversion for those passions which continue to resist his efforts: and it may be said that he suffers more from the evils which he is yet unable to overcome, than from all the acts of self-denial and mortification, by which he endeavours to atone for those which he has already conquered.

This is the pious ardour which the Spirit of God enkindles in the soul. Now, my beloved, judge yourselves according to this model: you cannot easily be deceived; a slight examination will show whether you are of the number of the just, or whether you are animated by the spirit of the world.

The spirit of the world is averse to mortification and restraint: it favours every irregular desire, and stands up in defence of vanity and pleasure. This is the spirit of the world. I will not say that it always stimulates the soul to indulge in criminal excesses. No: it is a subtle spirit; its principal object is to corrupt the heart; and provided it can attain its ends, it is indifferent as to the means, whether it be by urging the soul to notorious crimes, or by infusing a multiplicity of worldly inclinations—inclinations which separately perhaps, may not be criminal, but which, when united together, and subsisting habitually in the soul, form the character of a perfect worldling. This is a state of sin and death; and although it be not sullied by great crimes, it separates the soul from God, and deprives her of his Spirit as effectually as the most criminal life.

The man, therefore, who attends to the external duties of religion, and at the same time is unmortified in his affections, and a stranger to self-denial; who is intent only on pleasure, and refuses himself no gratification that is not evidently offensive to God; who seeks ease and comfort on all occasions, and is solicitous only to avoid criminal voluptuousness, who admits every alleviation which sloth and tepidity have introduced, and complies with the letter of the law, and no

more; that man, I say, is a worldling, and the Spirit of God is not with him.

Examine yourselves, my beloved, on these subjects. You, perhaps, are not guilty of any notorious transgressions: but that is not sufficient. Do you offer violence to self-love? Do you labour to subdue the depravity of corrupt nature? Have you acquired, by the means of piety, a command over your worldly and irregular inclinations? Do you perform voluntary acts of self-denial and penance? I do not ask whether you are visited with afflictions, because it is more than probable that you suffer from the world, from the difficulties attendant on your state of life, and from the frowardness of men: but what are the *voluntary* sufferings that you impose on yourselves? May it not be said, that the present regularity of your lives arises from far different causes than from the love of God? and that it costs you neither labour nor violence to enter upon it? If so—if it is not in your power to adduce acts of self-denial and mortification, voluntary sufferings, and sacrifices of your worldly affection in proof of the descent of the Holy Spirit into your souls, you have too much reason to fear that you are as yet under the influence of the spirit of the world, and that God is far removed from you.

Your examination, however, must not stop here. The truly reformed sinner not only endeavours to repress the ardour of passions by self-denials; but he endeavours likewise, by expiatory works of penance, to satisfy the justice of God, which has been already injured by his sins. The Spirit which I will give you, says our Saviour, "shall convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment."—*John*, xvi, 8: it shall convince the world of the extent of the debt which has been contracted by sin, of the means alone by which it can be discharged, of the sufferings I myself have endured in order to effect your reconciliation, and of the austerities that you yourselves must practise in order to avoid the severe judgments which await you hereafter.

On this head, therefore, examine yourselves. Do you feel that ardour for penitential austerities which never abates, because it is convinced that it can never endure sufficient to satisfy the injured justice of God? Do you submit to the painful duties of your state, and to the crosses and afflictions of life in the spirit of penance? If weakness of constitution will not allow you to practise the more severe works of penance, are you grieved at your inability to make that flesh the instrument of your repentance, which has been the occasion of your crimes? Do you chastise it as far at least as your

weakness will permit? Do you place yourselves in the rank of criminals, who have forfeited their right to the enjoyment of this world; of criminals who cannot otherwise obtain the reversal of the sentence of eternal death which they have incurred, than by condemning themselves to a temporal death, namely, by dying daily to the world, to the flesh, to their own will, and to all creatures, by voluntary works of penance and self-denial?

Ah! is it not too true that all your solicitude is directed to the pampering of a body, on which, probably, the Lord of Heaven looks down with an eye of indignation and disgust? You exert your ingenuity only in attempting to justify this spirit of sloth and self-enjoyment. You consider the obligation of penance as an obligation which may be neglected without any infringement of duty. So far from taking part with the justice of God, you take part only with yourselves: you say that the law requires too much from the infirmity of human nature: you seek every mitigation; you dread the least restraint, the least sensation of pain or languor: in a word, you love your body, and seek its comfort and ease, far more than you do the justice of God, which requires that it should be chastised and crucified.

If this be the state of your mind, depend upon it that the spirit by which you are animated is not the spirit of zeal and fervour which invariably attends the Spirit of God; but that it is the spirit of flesh and blood, which will never possess the kingdom of Heaven, because it is promised only to the lovers of self-denial and of the cross.

2. The last characteristic mark of the Spirit of God is constancy and resolution. The apostles, before the descent of the Holy Ghost, were weak and timid: they trembled at the voice of a woman servant: they fled at the death of Jesus; they concealed themselves in Jerusalem for fear of the Jews: not one of them all had courage to stand forward and speak in defence of the innocence and doctrine of their divine Master. But no sooner was the Spirit of God descended on them, than their former timidity was replaced by the most heroic fortitude: they appear in the midst of Jerusalem with a holy confidence. They proclaim the divinity of Jesus even before the priests and doctors of the law. They despise threats. They endure sufferings with joy for the name of Jesus. They reply boldly, that it is more just to obey God than man. And, as if Judea could not offer dungeons and persecutions proportionate to their courage, they scatter themselves over the whole world, where the ferocity of the most barbarous nations, the cruelty of the most savage tyrants, the

prospect of the most ignominious death, produced no other effect on their minds than an increase of courage and fortitude.

The same effect, although in a less sensible manner, is produced in the soul of every Christian by the presence of the Spirit of God. He is raised as it were above himself; he is admitted to a participation of the dignity and power of that Holy Spirit; he is sealed with the divine characters of liberty and independence; he is placed as it were in the bosom of the Divinity, from whence, casting his eyes over the universe, he views without intimidation the oppressions and persecutions that are prepared for him, and he treats with contempt the united efforts of the world and the devil, by which they endeavour to oppose the reign of God in his soul.

Truly, my beloved, there is no character on earth so dignified, so noble, so magnanimous, as the man who is directed by the Spirit of God. The greatness and magnanimity which is derived from the world is mean and contemptible in the comparison. The worldling, with all his grandeur, enjoys no true liberty; he is dependent on the world; and in proportion to his dependence, so much does he dread its censures and frowns. But the just man fears not the world; its railleries and derisions affect him no more than the tinkling of a cymbal. He glories in the service of God, even in the presence of those who glory in their shame; he pays deference to no one to the prejudice of religion; he condescends to no timid complaisance injurious to piety; he refuses even to conform to the common maxims of the world on these occasions, because he is convinced that, so far from promoting the welfare of sinners by such condescensions, he would contribute only to confirm them in the error of their ways. This was the Spirit which animated the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Their zeal was attributed to the fumes of wine, but their zeal was not repressed but inflamed by this calumnious insinuation; they were treated as fools by the multitude, but they were more confirmed in their holy folly by these derisions; they were calumniated as seducers, but they took no other means of proving to the world the justness of their cause than those by which they had incurred its censures—namely, they continued to condemn, to edify, and censure it.

Now the spirit of the world is a pliant—a politic spirit. Being solely under the influence of self-love, it seeks the truth only inasmuch as it is agreeable; it espouses the cause of piety in the presence only of those who admire piety; it

glories in the practice of virtue on those occasions only when it redounds to its honour. This is the spirit of the world. And is it not with this spirit, my beloved, that we are animated? Are we not timid and reserved, when we ought to appear openly in the cause of God and religion? Do we not shrink when duty obliges us to expose ourselves to censures and derisions for his glory; and do we not dignify our cowardice by the name of *prudence?* In order not to be at variance with the world, do we not appear worldly, do we not speak its language, applaud its maxims, follow its customs, and, on some occasions, even participate in its crimes.

Ah! if we judge ourselves impartially, we shall acknowledge that this is not an unfaithful description of our own character. I do not mean to insinuate that we are totally devoid of the love of truth; no: I readily allow that we follow the world with a kind of regret; that we avoid its more criminal excesses: and that our conduct is distinguished by regularity, and by due attention to the external duties of religion. But we may be all this, and still be animated by the spirit which animates the declared worldling. This at least is certain, that we are not directed by the Spirit of God; for the Spirit of God is free and independent; it does not fear the world, becauses it despises it; it does not seek to please the world, because it is crucified to it; it does not solicit the approbation of the world, because it condemns its maxims; it does not court the friendship of the world, because it is its declared enemy; it is not seduced by the allurements and example of the world, because it has conquered it. Timidity, therefore, is totally opposite to the Spirit of God; and no greater proof could we give that we are animated by the spirit of the world, than when we fear the world more than God, when we endeavour to please the world at the expense of religion, and when we sacrifice duty rather than be wanting in respect and attention to creatures.

Great God! infuse into our hearts, we beseech thee, that triple spirit of recollection, self-denial, and constancy, which thou didst infuse into the hearts of thy disciples on the day of Pentecost—that Holy Spirit, by whose powerful influence thou didst change them into new men, and madest them the conquerors of the world, and undaunted witnesses of thy truth. Expel for ever from our breasts the spirit of the world, the spirit of dissipation and timidity, the spirit of immortification and sloth, the spirit of vanity and human respect, which has hitherto occupied the throne in our souls which was made for thee alone. Renew on this day our desires, our affections, and our thoughts.

Come, O Holy Spirit, into our hearts; take the place of this miserable world, which we abhor, but which we have not as yet had the courage to renounce; and after thou hast established here below thy abode in us, may we hereafter become the eternal temples of thy glory and truth!

XXXVIII.—TRINITY SUNDAY.

ON THE NECESSARY DISPOSITIONS FOR THE COMMENCEMENT OF A NEW LIFE.

"Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you."—*Matt.*, xxiii, 20.

These, beloved Christians, are the last injunctions of our Redeemer to his disciples. After having educated them in his divine school, and taught them all the maxims of his Heavenly doctrine—after having made them strong and perfect, and prepared them for the reception of the enlivening Spirit of grace and love, he invests them with full authority to preach the gospel, and defines the nature and extent of their arduous mission. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them.....teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even until the consummation of the world."

This commission is fraught with much instruction on two very important points. From it we learn the extent of the power with which the pastors of the Church, in quality of successors to the apostles, are invested; and the extent of the duties which *you*, as Christians, are bound to fulfil. From it we learn, that *we*, who are the pastors rightfully ordained, and lawfully sent by the Church, receive our mission and our power from Heaven; and that *you* are obliged to observe all things whatsoever we are commanded to preach in the name of Jesus.

The first ought to be a subject of consolation, and induce you to return thanks to God, who has not only traced out the path to life eternal, but has constituted guides—guides enlightened and directed by him, in order that this path may be pointed out to you in the clearest manner, and that there might be a living authority worthy of our firmest confidence. The second is sufficient to terrify you; for the command is absolute, and exacts from you the observance of all things whatsoever have been commanded. The first requires no

comment: I will therefore confine my observations to the second, and will lay before you the extent of the obligations which we are commanded to require of you.

1. According to the rules of justice, the sacrifice of our lives might be demanded of us; because, the moment we sinned, we forfeited our right to existence, and became the victims of death. But the clemency of God has mitigated the sentence; and instead of the sacrifice of our lives, the sacrifice of sensual pleasures is all that he is pleased to call for. This, therefore, is a duty which the sovereign will of God has imposed upon all Christians. This duty we engaged to fulfil at our baptism. These are the victims we are commanded to immolate, in order to obtain our discharge from the malediction pronounced on all flesh, and to be admitted into the society of the people of God. This is the martyrdom of faith, to which we have devoted ourselves. This is the grand testimony which we are bound to give to the truths of God.

A life of self-denial and penance, therefore, is indispensably required of all who confess the name of Christ. No mitigation of this duty can be pleaded for; the precept is absolute and without exception, and no power on earth can dispense from it. This being the truth, what opinion must we form of the conversion of those sinners who reform only the irregularities of their exterior deportment; who shun the ways of debauchery and excess, because they are wearied in the pursuit of iniquity; who retire from the giddy and clamorous scenes of dissipation, because they wish to enjoy the tranquillity of retirement; who begin again to frequent the sacraments, but neither do penance for their former crimes nor renounce their criminal attachments; who confess their sins, but continue to indulge their love for sensual gratification in private, and retain all their ambitious projects, their jealousies, their hatreds, their envies, their worldly affections and desires? What opinion, I say, must we form of Christians who are satisfied with such a reformation as this? Will they be acceptable to the Lord? Ah! like the first-born of the Israelites they offer themselves to him; that is, they present themselves to the priest, and offer themselves at the foot of the altar. But they do not devote themselves to the service of the temple; they do not become the inheritance of the Lord; they substitute other offerings in their place; they substitute exterior works—works that are wholly destitute of that which is the soul and principle of true piety—the spirit of love. They imagine that God will be satisfied with the exchange: but no: the sacrifice of the heart is demanded, and if a single part is reserved, the whole will be rejected.

This, nevertheless, is in general the whole change that is witnessed in the reformed worldling. He begins to lead a more tranquil and retired life, not because he loves God above all things, but because he is satiated with other enjoyments: he refuses himself every criminal excess, not because he hates the crime of intemperance, but because he is more in love with himself, and is more attentive to the care of his health and the preservation of his property: he dedicates himself to the Lord, but he retains all his former affections: he makes no sacrifice of his will: he does not slay the victim as the law enjoins: the sword of self-denial effects no painful separation.

Seeing, however, that he perseveres in the participation of the holy mysteries, that he is exempt from the customary excesses of the world, and that he walks to all appearance in the same path as the just man, he is prompted to conclude that he has finished the great work, and that he is justified in the sight of God. Thus, without offering up the painful sacrifice of his sensual appetites, of his desires and hopes, of his antipathies and hatreds, of his pride and ambition, he is deluded by the idea that he has entered on a life of virtue, that he has renounced the world, and that he has made the oblation which the Lord required at his hands.

But, my beloved, true piety is the sacrifice of the heart; and this sacrifice must be real and universal. Every inordinate attachment, every criminal affection, every vicious habit, must be permanently renounced; and the soul must evaporate, as it were, like a holocaust on the altar of divine love.

2. This, I acknowledge, is a work of difficulty; but it is indispensable. Human prudence, indeed, pretends to point out an easier method of reform: it says that the sinner ought not divorce himself all at once from the world; that if he undertake too much in the beginning, he will probably fail in the end; that it would be more advisable to conquer himself in small things at first, and then proceed to others; that, in the commencement of a new life, many allowances will be made for human infirmities; and that he should try his strength on his weaker enemies before he attacks the stronger, in the same manner as David conquered lions and bears before he dared to encounter Goliah.

But, my beloved, such prudence as this will not avail you. It is in vain that you endeavour to conquer your passions one by one. A reformation of life requires a different kind of circumspection and caution from all other undertakings. If it is not entire at once, it will not succeed: all is yet to be

done, as long as one vicious habit remains unsubdued; if you attack them separately you attempt only to cut off one head of the hydra at a time, which will immediately shoot forth, and regain its former vigour. Grace will not admit of a divided victory.

Piety, I allow, has its degrees, and may be perfected daily more and more: forty years are required for completing the walls and temple of the spiritual Jerusalem. But the world, and every criminal attachment, must be immediately expelled from the heart; every thing incompatible with Christian piety must immediately be renounced; and as soon as the voice of the Lord is heard in the soul, the walls of the sinful Jericho must fall down before him, and become a heap of ruins.

3. The man who sincerely desires to renounce the ways of sin is not dismayed by the prospect of difficulties. He encounters without fear the world, the flesh, and the devil, at the same time: he is even hurried into pious excesses by the superabundance of his fervour. He does not dispute with the Lord concerning the exact sum which he is to pay, but courageously devotes himself to a life of unremitted penance and mortification, and is guided in the performance of his works of atonement not by the prescribed limits of duty, but by the transports of an animated zeal.

This is the conduct of the truly reformed penitent. But, alas, my beloved, where is it to be witnessed? In general, the trifling—the nominal penance imposed by the minister in confession, is the only act of atonement which the sinner offers up to the injured justice of God. His first solicitude is to discover the path which is the easiest and the most agreeable to self-love. So far from attempting anything beyond the limits of duty, he studies how far he may conform to the maxims of the world without an absolute violation of the law. In the plan which he forms for his future conduct, he allots as much to the world as he does to God. Instead of selecting for his imitation the most eminent models of piety, he declares that he will avoid the extremes into which he pretends that they were imprudently hurried; he says that he will not affect singularity, and that he will not attend to those trifling observances, which, in his opinion, savour more of superstition than of sanctity.

Thus, so far from admiring in their character the traits which are worthy of his notice, he is solicitous only to discover imaginary defects, and thus he prefaces the dedication of himself to God, by stigmatising the conduct of those good men, who served him with sincerity and truth. He deter-

mines to give that only to God, which he cannot refuse; and he treats with him, not as with an irritated father whom he is solicitous to appease, but as with an enemy, to whom no unnecessary concession is to be granted.

But, my beloved, the man who intends to prescribe bounds to his love of God, is a stranger to the nature of divine love. The man who seeks to alleviate the sorrows of repentance by every lawful indulgence, has very faint ideas of the enormity of sin. Yes; the sincerity of that Christian's conversion who puts limits to his zeal, is doubtful at the best; and it would not be rash to conclude that a very trifling change is wrought in the heart, when the person takes time to reflect on, and to claim merit from, the first works of repentance.

A true and permanent reform of life is never commenced with such coldness and indifference. Then it is that the penitent is overpowered as it were with the infusions of grace; then it is that he is unable to restrain the impetuosity of his grief; that his tears never seem to flow in sufficient abundance; and that his compunction never attains its desired height. The view of the deplorable state in which he has hitherto lived, spreads terror over his soul, and arms him with indignation against himself. When the minister of God attempts to moderate his fears, and to repress the violence of his grief, he describes in the strongest terms the severity of God's justice, and pathetically acknowledges that he cannot console himself with the assurance that the clemency of the Great Judge will be extended to him in such a liberal manner as his director represents. Animated with this holy spirit, he is resolved to redeem the time which has been criminally squandered away in the pursuit of folly; to dedicate the remainder of his life to the most perfect love; and never more to forget the inestimable blessing of the knowledge of the truth which has been imparted to him. With a holy jealousy he reflects on the happiness of those who dedicated themselves to the service of God in the days of their youth; and he laments that his own folly and blindness have so long prevented him from loving that amiable Benefactor and Parent, who alone is worthy of his love. Zeal impels him to chastise his flesh on account of its defilements, and to make subservient to justice those members which have so long been subservient to iniquity.

These are the marks of a true repentance: this is a fervour which will never fall away. The sacrifice is perfect and entire: the fervour and superabundance of love consume it, and cause it to ascend in the odour of sweetness even to the throne of the Most High.

4. In the last place, the sincerely reformed Christian is animated with the spirit of docility. He knows that the designs of Providence are concealed from his view; and therefore, instead of following the dictates of human prudence, he submits implicitly to the laws and maxims of the gospel. He knows that under the guidance of his Maker he will never err, but that his fall will be inevitable, if he attempts to accommodate his piety to times and circumstances.

Are you, my beloved, animated with this docile spirit. Ah! instead of following the laws of the gospel with simplicity, you violate them, and seek to excuse the violation by alleging pious pretexts. You omit many important exercises of devotion and penance, under pretence that they are singularities, calculated only to excite the ridicule of worldlings, and throw an odium on religion. You abstain from the sacrament, under pretence that familiarity with holy things will diminish your respect for them. You resent injuries, on the supposition that duty requires you to vindicate your character from every attack. You refuse to endure calumny in silence, under the pretence that the honour of God is interested, and that the impostor ought to be detected, and in order to guard against his attempts for the future. Thus is religion frequently made a cloak for the concealment of the worst passions.

But, my beloved, the laws of God are positive and evident. It is our duty to leave in his hands the power of avenging his glory, and to submit with simplicity and obedience to every duty. He himself commands us to obey; and since no reasons have induced him to change his holy laws, no reasons are sufficient to warrant a temporary suspension of our obedience.

Sometimes you refuse to have recourse to the more minute exercises of piety, under pretence that such exercises are calculated only for the simple and untutored Christian; and you neglect the more trivial observances of exterior worship, under pretence that you possess a more enlightened piety, and that you are not edified by such observances. But, my beloved, by these exterior aids, by these apparently trivial exercises, is fervour maintained, and the Christian preserved from neglecting the more essential duties of religion.

Everything is useful to true piety. Faith is awakened, love is inflamed, and hope is cherished by the minutest observances. Nothing is imperfect but works that are destitute of fervour. The most simple exercises of piety, when accompanied with fervent love, are as dignified in the sight of God as the contemplations of the seraphim. The perfection of devotion consists,

not in the pretended sublimity of the duties we perform, but in a certain liveliness of faith, which may attend the performance of the most ordinary works of piety, as well as of the most exalted.

Many people imagine that they are advanced in the paths of perfection, because they devote themselves to more elevated functions, to more sublime meditations, and to more perfect methods of prayer: but if, at the time that they perform these enlightened exercises, they are subject to the defects of the weak and imperfect Christian, their perfection is imaginary. We will allow that they contemplate the glories of the Lord, like the apostles on mount Thabor, but they are not divested of the inclinations of flesh and blood: they are more solicitous to build for themselves a tabernacle and a permanent dwelling-place on earth, than to fulfil the will of God without reserve, and to deny themselves.

Be on your guard, my beloved; suffer not yourselves to be deceived by any of these false appearances. The defective offerings, the imperfect conversions, which I have described, frequently lead to a more dangerous state than the open state of sin. Correspond, therefore, faithfully with the designs of God: walk on resolutely in the path which the gospel points out to you, and let not your passions, concealed under the cloak of piety, obstruct the views which Providence has formed for your eternal welfare. Live under the immediate guidance of the Most High, and with the perfect sacrifice of your hearts unite that fidelity which will continually cause your fervour to be renewed; which will impel you to observe all whatsoever the Lord hath commanded, which will preserve unto the end the treasure of justice, and obtain for you the consummation of it in the regions of never-ending bliss.

XXXIX.—CORPUS CHRISTI.

ON AN UNWORTHY COMMUNION.

"Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of our Lord."—I. *Cor.*, xi, 27.

Being invited by the Church on this day to return thanks to God for the inestimable blessing which he has bequeathed to us in the holy sacrament of the altar, I would gladly enter on the agreeable subject, and exhort you to pour forth your souls before the Almighty in the sweetest canticles of love and praise; but as this has been already treated of in a former

discourse, I must call your attention on this day of spiritual joy, to a subject of a gloomy nature, and describe the dismal effects of an unworthy communion.

The love which Jesus has manifested for us in the institution of this mystery—a love which would not suffer him to leave us orphans during the few years of our mortal existence on earth, is rejected with contempt by unbelievers, and repaid with ingratitude by many who enjoy the light of truth. The advocates of the late defection from the centre of unity, the Catholic Church, direct their chief attacks against this mystery of love, and by their unworthy scoffs and derisions endeavour to bring into contempt a sacrament which excites the astonishment of angels, and has been one of the greatest objects of veneration and worship to the whole Christian world from the time of its institution.

The dishonour which is offered to God by the obstinacy of our brethren in error, is undoubtedly great; but it is not equal to the dishonour which is offered by the ingratitude of the believer who communicates unworthily. The former, like the Jews, turn away from our Lord, saying: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? this saying is hard, and who can hear it"—*John*, vi: but the latter, the men of his peace, who walk with him with consent in the house of the Lord, who take sweet meats together with him—these, like the impious Judas the traitor, "eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the body of the Lord."

In order that your faith may be roused on this solemn festival, and that you may be excited to avoid with circumspection and fear this greatest of all crimes, I will describe the enormity of an unworthy communion, and display before your eyes the terrible judgments which hang over the head of the sacrilegious receiver.

The apostle declares, in the words of my text, that he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of our Lord:" that is, shall be guilty of the crime of deicide, by crucifying again, as far as his power will permit, the Lord of Glory. This, my beloved, is not an exaggerated description of the enormity of this crime; it is the truth, and nothing but the truth: for if the sacrifice of the cross be renewed daily on our altars on the part of Jesus, his crucifixion likewise is renewed on the part of the sinner, as often as he communicates unworthily: and this, with circumstances infinitely more aggravating than when he was crucified in a bloody manner on mount Calvary. For your instruction in this particular, I will draw a comparative statement of the guilt of both Jews and Christians.

1. In the first place, if the Jews had known the Lord of Glory, says the apostle (1 *Cor.*, ii, 8,) they would not have crucified him. They imagined that the Jesus, whom they persecuted, was merely the son of Joseph and Mary: they thought that he was a seducer of the people, and a declared opposer of the law of Moses. Their ignorance, I allow, was not excusable: because the works, the doctrine, the sanctity of Jesus, the accomplishment of the prophecies in his ministry, ought to have opened their eyes, and convinced them that he was in fact the Messiah whom they had so long expected. But, whether their ignorance be excusable or not is a question of little importance in this discussion: I have only to state that they did not acknowledge him, that they did not distinguish him from the many false Messiahs, who, a short time before that period, had disturbed the peace of Palestine, and excited seditions in Jerusalem: and that, when they condemned him to a disgraceful death, they thought that they were doing a work acceptable to the Lord, and that they were vindicating the honour of his worship and his laws: in a word, "they knew not what they did."—*Luke*, xxiii, 34. But it is not so with the unworthy communicant. There is no plea of ignorance to extenuate his crime. He believes that Jesus is the Messiah: he beholds him with the eyes of faith really present on our altars; he acknowledges him to be the Lord of Glory, the Son of the Most High, the Splendour of the Father, the immortal King of ages, the Saviour of the world, the Head and the Spouse of the Church. He acknowledges all these august qualities in his person, and, with full consciousness of his crimes, he dares to insult him, and to condemn him to a more disgraceful death in his own breast, than that which he endured on the cross: he avowedly lifts up his hand against the Almighty.

Secondly, the executioners who crucified our Lord on Mount Calvary, may be called the ministers of God's justice. By their crime they accomplished the designs of the Father, and executed the sentence of death which he pronounced upon his Son immediately after the fall of our first parents. They were the instruments by which our Lord effected his resolution of offering himself in sacrifice to the Father—a resolution which he formed in the first instant of his conception. They seemed in some degree to take part with God, and to second the efforts of his love for the redemption of mankind: they raised their hands against the Holy One at a time when every hand was to be lifted up against him. But the unworthy communicant accomplishes no designs of the Almighty. On the contrary, he dishonours the Son at the

time that the Father is glorifying him: he drags him from the bosom of his Father against his will. No one unites with him for the purpose of completing the sacrilegious tragedy: the Son does not deliver himself into his hands as he did into the hands of the Jews: the sinner alone is the party concerned: he alone forms the design: he alone executes it: Heaven and earth look down with horror on his crime: and the whole guilt of the blood of the innocent Lamb of God falls on him alone.

Thirdly, the crime of the Jews was beneficial to all mankind. They spilled the blood which was to wash away all our defilements: they immolated the Lamb; and by this immolation our reconciliation with the Father was effected: they put to death the Just One, but by this means death itself was subdued: they opened his side, and the Church of all nations issued out of it: they pierced his hands, and innumerable blessings were immediately scattered over the universe: they erected the cross, and in process of time it triumphed over the whole world: in a word, theirs was one of those fortunate crimes, if it may be so called, by the means of which the great work of our salvation was completed, and the eternal designs of God upon his Church were finally accomplished.

But when this detestable outrage has been committed, and the sinner has sported himself with crucifying the Lord of Glory upon our altars, and has incurred the guilt of his body and blood by an unworthy communion, what benefit can be derived from his impious sacrilege? What can we expect will be the consequence of such hardened guilt as this? What but the fear that it will contribute to draw down the most dreadful judgments on the Christian world. For if the Apostle, even in the time of primitive fervour and piety, attributed all the calamities which afflicted the Church of Corinth to unworthy communions, what judgments may we not expect will be drawn down on our heads by the profanations of so many unworthy ministers, and of so many tepid and dissolute Christians, who pollute our altars in this corrupted age? May we not attribute to this cause the unspeakable evils which have so long afflicted the Catholic world? For, if Heaven could not witness the crime of those who crucified him without manifesting its indignation by signs and wonders, although the salvation of man was to be the consequence: if all nature was troubled and in confusion; if the veil of the temple was rent; and if the whole universe appeared as if struck by the hand of God; what other consequences must ensue from the same outrage a thousand times

repeated, but the derangement of seasons, the confusion of nature, the overthrow of empires, and the revolution of the whole Christian world.

Fourthly, the crime of the unhappy men who crucified our Lord will not appear in such odious colours, if we consider the motives by which they were actuated. In the first place, the priests and Pharisees sought the death of a man who openly degraded them in the eyes of the people, who exposed their hypocrisy to view, who called them whitened sepulchres, fair without and rotten within; and it was their interest that their accuser himself should be condemned as a malefactor, in order that their reputation and authority might be restored among the people. But the unworthy communicant has nothing to allege in extenuation of his crime. He is spared by his Lord at the time that he betrays him; his faults are not attended to; and his secret defilements are as it were overlooked. Even when he gives the perfidious kiss, Jesus does not hurl the shafts of his vengeance on him, nor does he suddenly appear before him in all the terrors of his majesty, and throw him prostrate on the ground, as he formerly did the Jewish rabble, with these words, "I am the Jesus whom thou seekest." No: his Lord is all clemency and love: he restrains his arm: he is tender of the reputation of his deluded creature: he does not expose him to the scoffs and derisions of his brethren by thrusting him forcibly from the altar. Nevertheless, at the time that he receives these singular marks of benevolence from his God, he dares to insult him in the most outrageous and sanguinary manner.

In the second place, it is not recorded that the blind whom he had restored to sight, or the lame whom he had healed, or the lepers whom he had cleansed, or the dead whom he had raised to life, were of the number of those who crucified him. They did not indeed speak openly in his defence, but at least they abhorred the crime of taking part with his executioners.

This places the ingratitude of the unworthy communicant in the strongest point of view. He was blind, and the Lord restored him to sight; he was struck with leprosy, and the Lord repeatedly cleansed him; he was dead, and the Lord raised him to life. These were blessings indeed, and one would have thought that the mind of man would have shuddered at the idea of revolting against the author of them. If the infidel, the pagan, the barbarian, who had never been favoured with his choicest gifts, had dishonoured his mysteries, it would not excite our astonishment; but that the believer, from whom he had concealed nothing—that the disciple of

his gospel, to whom he had revealed all his mysteries, imparted all his gifts, and admitted to the hopes of all his promises—that the Christian who was made the flesh of his flesh, and the bone of his bone, by the ineffable union which he contracted with him in baptism—that he should declare against his benefactor, and lift up his consecrated hand as if to hurl him from his throne of mercy—Ah! this is ingratitude indeed! Our Lord himself could not conceal his astonishment at such an unparalleled outrage: "If my enemy," said he by the mouth of his prophet, "if my enemy had insulted me, I would verily have borne with it: but thou art the man of my peace, my guide, my familiar, who didst walk with me with consent in the house of God. (*Psalm*, liv, 13). For thee I have endured the ignominies of the cross: thee I have distinguished above all my disciples: and instead of repaying me by a return of love and affection, thou heapest on me the most intolerable insults and injuries." Truly, my beloved, the crime is beyond the powers of description. The executioners who nailed him to the cross seemed to be entitled to some favour in his sight on account of their ignorance: he even prayed for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But he cannot witness the profanation of his blood on our altars without demanding vengeance against the unhappy, the sacrilegious receiver.

Fifthly, the circumstances which attended the crucifixion of our Lord on Mount Calvary were glorious: they manifested his power and divinity, even in the midst of his humility and disgrace. All nature acknowledged him for her Creator: the centurion confessed that he was the Son of God: the dead rose and appeared to many: he himself appeared to many on the third day, and by the splendour of his resurrection removed the scandal which the ignominies of his passion had created in the eyes of men. But the mystical death which he suffers on our altars by the hand of the unworthy communicant is attended with nothing but ignominy and reproach. His splendour is eclipsed: his majesty and divinity are concealed: gall and wormwood alone are the ingredients of his chalice: he is led as it were to execution without a sigh from the surrounding multitude: the veil which covers him in the tremendous mysteries is not rent: all nature is silent, no repentant centurions confess that he is the Son of God: on the contrary, unbelievers who witness the irregular conduct of the unworthy communicant, and behold his approach to the holy table, take occasion to blaspheme the name of the Lord, to ridicule the truly just man, to defame piety itself, and say with the Pharisee: "This Jesus, if he

were a prophet, would certainly know who and what manner of man this is that touches and receives him, that he is a sinner."—*Luke*, vii, 39. In a word, Jesus descends into the breast of the unworthy profaner, not to rise again, but to see corruption, and to seal the death and reprobation of the unhappy criminal with the broad seal of eternity.

I do not exceed the truth: no, my beloved, faith assures us that there is no crime more enormous than the crime of an unworthy communion; and the gospel assures us, that there is none that draws down more heavy judgments on the delinquent. St. Paul declares that, "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation." He does not say that *he is condemned*, but that *he eateth and drinketh his own condemnation:* that is to say, that the sacred food which he profanes spreads like a poison through his whole frame, penetrates even into the marrow of his bones, and becomes inseparable from his very being. By the commission of any other crime the soul is disfigured and enervated only in some of her powers; but this crime corrupts her whole substance, and leaves no soundness in any part. There is a malediction attached to it, which is seldom or never effaced from the brow of the sacrilegious perpetrator. Every avenue to a reconciliation with his offended God is rendered almost imperviable: the graces of Heaven are withdrawn, and he is left like the unhappy Judas, the only unworthy communicant recorded in the gospel, to perish in despair.

This example is worthy of your most serious consideration. Judas did not appear to be conscious that it was the Messias that he betrayed: in his opinion Jesus was nothing more than a just man: and when he acknowledged his crime before the council, he did not say that he had betrayed his God, but that he had betrayed innocent blood. But his ignorance did not excuse him. Satan entered into his soul at the moment that he sacrilegiously partook of the body of his Lord at the last supper; and his death is the most dreadful, the most deplorable, that is to be found in the whole extent of the inspired writings. I pretend not, however, to say that the crime is too great to be forgiven; but I say, that the grace—the extraordinary grace which is required for true repentance, is seldom granted to the unworthy communicant, and that few or none ever sincerely effect a reconciliation with their much injured God.

Jesus, while on earth, appeared to pay less attention to his natural body, than to his eucharistical body in the blessed sacrament. He pardoned the injuries inflicted on the one, but was inexorable respecting the other. He did not refuse

to dwell in the poorest cottage: he did not complain even when he had not a place whereon to lay his head: he chose for the place of his birth the habitation of brute beasts. But when he celebrated the mystery of his last supper, ah! then he commanded his disciples to prepare a large commodious furnished apartment: all was to be in order: all was to correspond with the magnificence and sanctity of this august sacrament. Now, it is this eucharistical body, of the glory of which our Lord Jesus Christ appeared so jealous, that the sinner pollutes and vilifies: it is this eucharistical body he crucifies in the manner the most ignominious and odious. Oh, who can conceive the enormity of his crime! If the ark of Israel overturned and broke in pieces the idol of Dagon when it was placed by its side, why does not the true ark of Israel —Jesus Christ—when he descends into the breast of the unworthy, immediately reduce to ashes the polluted vessel which dares to receive him? If flames burst out from the sanctuary and destroyed the rash Levites who presumed to offer incense with unhallowed fire, why do not flames burst from our altars, and consume the sinner that dares to insult the Lord himself? Ah! the visible judgments of God are restrained; but it is only that the more dreadful judgments might be inflicted hereafter. The divine justice enkindles a fire, not in the sanctuary, but in the place of woe, where it will never be extinguished. It does not inflict immediate death on the delinquent, but it strikes him with an invisible anathema. It does not rend the bowels of the unhappy wretch, but it closes the bowels of God's mercy in his regard, and abandons him to the corruption of his heart. These, my beloved, are the severest judgments which God can inflict.

Let me exhort you, therefore, to reflect on and to abhor the crime of a sacrilegious communion. It is not my intention that the terrible description I have given should deter you from approaching the holy table. God forbid! What! Shall it be supposed that, because I endeavour to deter you from insulting the Lord of Glory, I am promoting the reign of irreligion, and deterring you from expressing your love and veneration for him? Shall it be supposed that, because I warn you against the danger of converting the bread of life into a deadly poison, I am advising you to abstain altogether from it, and thus deprive yourselves of the necessary means of salvation? Shall it be supposed that, unless you be duly prepared to receive the gifts of the Father of Mercies, you will receive a serpent instead of a fish, a stone instead of bread—shall it be supposed that I am advising you not to prepare yourselves at all, but to renounce at once all the

blessings and favours of Heaven? No, my beloved; such a supposition cannot be formed. The bread of life is necessary for you; your eternal salvation depends on the frequent participation of it: unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.

The object, therefore, of this discourse is, to induce you to look seriously into yourselves, and if you discover that you have at any time incurred the guilt of an unworthy communion, to devote the remainder of your lives to the severest penance. But if you have reason to believe that this has never been your unhappy lot, then it is my object to induce you to make some reparation by the superabundance of your love, for the injuries offered to the God of majesty in this sacrament by unworthy Christians.

Offer up your hearts, therefore, on the altar of divine love in behalf of your brethren. Present yourselves frequently at the holy table, and offer up your communions for them. Your prayers will be acceptable to the Lord, and on your account he will enlighten the darkness of unbelievers, he will shower down the graces of repentance on the unworthy communicant, and he will reserve a crown of justice for you against the great day of retribution.

XL.—SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE OBSTACLES OPPOSED BY SELF-LOVE TO A LIFE OF VIRTUE.

"None of these men that were invited shall taste of my supper."—*Luke*, xiv, 24.

In this parable our blessed Saviour exposes the perverse opposition of the heart of man to the calls and inspirations of Heaven. We all say with the man to whom this parable was addressed: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." We all desire this happiness; and we all propose to attain it. But, when the moment arrives that we must forsake our worldly pursuits, that we must lay aside the defiled garments of sensual pleasure, and prepare for the wedding—ah! then we begin all at once to make an excuse. The farm, the oxen, the wife, something or other is sure to be in the way that requires our attendance. We are unable to disengage ourselves from our temporal occupations; or, in other words, our affections are so entirely fixed on the things of the world, that the delights of the royal banquet of Jesus

are not sufficiently attractive to engage us to give them the preference.

But, my brethren, excuses of this kind will not be admitted "not one of these men shall taste of my supper." It is not sufficient that we love virtue: we must follow it, or we shall be cast into outer darkness, however plausible may be our excuses. That you may not be deceived in a point of such consequence, I will examine the pretexts usually alleged on these occasions, and will prove their insufficiency to exempt you from the general sentence which was pronounced on all who refused to comply with the invitation of our Lord.

1. I readily admit that, notwithstanding the universal depravity of mankind, iniquity has not so far prevailed as to meet with public applause; and that, in general, men are not so corrupt as to pride themselves on their profligacy, or as the apostle says, to glory in their shame. Vice still continues to be branded in part with the infamy it deserves: every one endeavours to conceal it from the public eye; and the remains of our primitive innocence retain sufficient influence over the mind to compel it to condemn in public what its depravity is too apt to countenance in private.

There is, however, a way of living which has obtained the approbation of the world—a way which is not defiled by excess—a way which, in appearance, is conformable to the law of the gospel, but which, in reality, is as opposite to its spirit, as the way which is followed by the most profligate worldling. This is the kind of life which the world is accustomed to hold out to those who are really disposed to save their souls, under pretence that all beyond this is only bigotry and superstition.

Hence arises the first great obstacle to piety. From this false idea of virtue entertained by the world, we contract a certain fear or shame, which hinders us from devoting ourselves to the pure service of God. In order not to act in opposition to the general opinion, we do many things which our consciences condemn, and we omit others which we are too well convinced ought to be performed. The defence which is usually set up for this kind of conduct is, that we are obliged to conform with the prevailing customs, and that other people entertain no scruple on that head; that it is not positively condemned by the gospel, and that it is presumptuous to censure the ways of all mankind by adopting singularities. Thus it is that the timid Christian either refuses to be enlightened, or is induced to accommodate himself to the world, and, like David in the court of king Achis, is obliged to disguise himself in the presence of others. Seldom does he

dare to appear in his true dress: whilst the libertine shows himself without constraint, and refuses obedience to the laws of God without a blush.

How long, Christian brethren, shall we refuse to open our eyes to the light of truth? We are averse to the practice of true piety, because it fixes the eyes of the world upon us, and makes us appear singular. But in the present disordered state of the world, how is it possible to be saved and appear otherwise? When it is publicly known that by far the greatest part of mankind are amusing themselves in the broad road that leadeth to destruction, can it be expected that the few who designedly separate from them, and choose to walk in the narrow path of the gospel, will be suffered to pass without experiencing some degree of ridicule? And what if we are singular, and are pointed at—is that a motive to deter us from consulting our own safety? Would Noah have been justified if he had refused to build the ark on any plea that he could offer, drawn from the singularity of such a proceeding? Would Lot have escaped the flames of Sodom if, from the apprehension of appearing singular, he had obstinately persisted in a resolution not to leave it? Men are never more deceived than when they reason only from appearances. The saints were singular in every age: we are become, says St. Paul, spectacles to angels and men. If you propose to save your souls, you must live in a far different manner from the generality of mankind: the multitude walk in the broad road, and if you walk with them your ruin is inevitable.

But why should we be solicitous for pretexts to refuse submission to the will of Heaven? Shall we always find reasons enough for offending God, and living for a world which we ought to hate and fly from, as being the most determined enemy of our souls, and never one that would persuade us to return to so good, so beneficent, so loving a God? That there should be men in any situation of life who can deliberately withdraw themselves from the service of God, on any pretence or plea whatever, is astonishing. That this should be the habitual practice of almost every individual, is beyond conception, and beyond all measure to be lamented. Yet so it is. Conformity with the gospel is never convenient. In addition to the plea of singularity, one pleads the levity of youth; another, the infirmity and decrepitude of old age; hurry and solicitude of business, when prosperity smiles, is alleged by one; and agitation of mind, when in adversity, is alleged by another. In all the possible circumstances of life there is a reason found to justify tepidity and negligence in the service of God.

But, my beloved, by acting in this untoward manner, what is it we do? We frustrate the intentions of the Almighty, and disappoint all the most friendly views of Heaven in our regard. We suffer the time of mercy to escape, and, as if insensible of our own wants, and wholly indifferent about the means of alleviating them, indignantly turn aside from the hand which is open to relieve us. Alas! how different is the conduct of the worldling, when in pursuit of temporal wealth or honour! He suffers no opportunity to escape; the whole study of his mind is bent upon it; he is not to be turned aside by any difficulty he may have to encounter; he is not to be discouraged by any danger or disappointment. Oh, no! the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. They are constantly on the watch; but we, who neither love this world nor hate it, are never in a condition to enter seriously into any of the satisfactions of the present world, nor willing to prepare for the happiness of the world to come.

How often has our God admonished, solicited, importuned us to return to the paths of virtue! how often has he, even in the moment of our transgression, stretched forth the hand of his mercy in pure compassion towards us! how often has he, by the secret inspirations of his grace, convinced us of the dangerous consequences of a criminal life! Ah! the most unfeeling, the most inhuman man upon earth would be affected, were he to perceive that, at the moment he was plunging the dagger into our breast, we were taking measures for his escape: and shall not the tender solicitude of our Heavenly Parent to save us from destruction, even in the height of our rebellion against him, excite within us some sensation of regret, some sentiment of sorrow, some tender emotion of real grief and compunction at the sight of so much forbearance in the midst of the innumerable provocations which the base ingratitude of his most favoured creatures is, one way or other, daily and hourly retorting on him?

But let not the sinner flatter himself that this system of forbearance is to endure always. There is a time, we are told—and the warning is prophetic, for it comes from God—there is a time when the long and patient suffering even of this tender parent will be wearied out; when the unrighteous will go to judgment, and all chance of being reinstated in his favour, with all hope of remission, will be lost for ever. We are wrong if we imagine that he will always continue knocking at the door of our hearts. He has declared that he will not: and if we refuse to open them to him at the present time, we have

too much reason to fear that he will retire from us, and abandon us to all those terrible woes which he has denounced against the unfaithful servant.

How long, therefore, my brethren, shall we be deterred from the paths of virtue by these weak—these unworthy pretexts? Shall we be then only timid when salvation is at stake? Shall we be then only indolent, when the honour and glory of God require that we should act with the utmost energy?

2. A second obstacle which self-love opposes to a life of piety, is the idea of the difficulties with which it would be attended. "I know my weakness," the timid Christian says, "I hate a life of sin, and it is my desire never to wrong my neighbour; but the doctrine which is preached to me is above my strength. I acknowledge that, in order to live according to the gospel, I must deny myself far more than I have hitherto done: I know that Jesus will inflict the severest judgments hereafter on those who refuse to suffer here on earth; that they who love their souls too much in this life will lose them in the next; that if I do not take up my cross and follow him, I cannot be his disciple. I know that the life of a Christian ought to be a public profession of penance; and that I cannot be incorporated with Jesus Christ, unless I am crucified with him. This I know; and this it is that induces me to despair of attaining to true piety. I am candid, and wish not to impose upon myself or others; I acknowledge the extent of my obligations; and were I to embrace a life of piety, I would not do it by halves. I would not, like so many others, endeavour to reconcile God and the world, the gospel and self-love; for I know that, by attempting to please both, I should, in the end, be acceptable to neither."

But, allowing for the candour, where is the faith of the man who can reason in this manner? He acknowledges his weakness and incapacity; but is he ignorant that the grace of God is abundantly sufficient for him? Has he never heard the consoling sentence of his loving Master: "Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you?"—*Matt.*, xi, 28. Our Lord indeed declares, that without him we can do nothing; but does he not likewise declare, that with him we can do all things?—that his grace is sufficient to surmount every obstacle, and give strength to the most abject weakness? If, like the primitive Christians, we were exposed to the fury of persecutors; if we were required to sacrifice our property, our honour, our life, for the faith of Christ, then perhaps we might have reason to tremble at the sight of our weakness: but even then we

ought to say with the apostle: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me."—*Phil.*, iv, 13. Nothing of this, however, is required. Peaceable in the midst of our families and friends, exposed to no danger either respecting our property or our lives, nothing more is required of us than that we make the sacrifice of our passions, that we avoid sin, that we hate the world and its vanities, that we fulfil the precepts of the gospel, that we frequent the sacraments with fervour, that we love our neighbours, that we employ well our time, and that we carry cheerfully the cross of Christ. This is all that is required; and even to enable us to do this, the abundant graces of Heaven are at our command. And is it possible that we should despond!

O you generous disciples of former times! the most cruel torments could not separate you from the love of Christ: it was your sweetest consolation to be accounted worthy to suffer reproaches for the name of Jesus. But in these times, the duties of a Christian life are insupportable if they are found to interfere with our present amusements. Heaven was a goodly pearl in the estimation of our ancestors—a treasure of immense value, which could not be purchased at too high a price: now, it is considered as of inferior value, and hardly worthy of our notice even on the lowest terms.

But, my Christian brethren, when you shrink from the difficulties attendant on a life of piety, you seem to have no idea of the consolations which God has prepared on earth for those who love him; you seem to forget that the testimony of a good conscience, and the uninterrupted peace of mind which accompanies innocence, are pleasures so exquisite, that they may be called a foretaste of that endless felicity which is reserved for you in Heaven; you do not consider that all that can possibly be endured on earth is not worthy to be compared with the recompense which awaits your patience in the world to come. But, setting aside this consideration, were you to judge sincerely, you would freely acknowledge that a worldly life is attended with difficulties far beyond any that are experienced in a life of virtue; you would acknowledge that the contraints, the disappointments, the anxieties, and the emptiness of the world, render the condition of its unhappy followers wretched and miserable. How often, upon witnessing the reformation of any of your acquaintance, have you inwardly applauded the wisdom of their choice, and secretly wished that you could imitate their example? Truly, my beloved, could the soul of the just man be displayed before you in its true state, you would be enamoured with the description of the chaste pleasures and calm felicity which

enliven his days. What transports does he experience during the time of prayer, when raised, as it were, above the earth, he contemplates the joys of eternity, and beholds, as from an eminence, the figure of this world moving along like a shadow which passeth away, and gradually retiring at a distance from him? After pouring forth his soul before the Lord in humble supplication, what an aversion does he feel for the profane pleasures of worldlings! How does he pity and lament their blindness! In his eyes they appear no better than madmen smiling on the bed of death—than condemned criminals, who, ignorant of the sentence that is passed against them, are thoughtlessly rejoicing at the very moment when they are about to be precipitated into the awful gulf of eternity.

Ah! my beloved, the voluptuous, the ambitious, the earthly-minded will rise up against us at the last day, and, by the description of all that they endured in order to possess the means of gratifying their passions, will condemn the false pretexts by which we attempt to justify our weakness.

Let us arise from our lethargy. Cannot we do what so many others have done before us? Why should we suffer ourselves to be carried to and fro at the mercy of the waves, when others of both sexes, much younger than ourselves, are escaping shipwreck, and advancing safely into port? Have we not the same God to trust to as they had? Are not our hopes the same, and are we not called to the same inheritance? Yes: he has shown himself to be a God of mercy to us indeed: frequently has he stretched forth his hand to our assistance; but our pusillanimity has frustrated all his mercies. Let us arise without delay: let us entreat the God of mercies to command us once more to return to him, and to command us with that powerful and attractive voice which no heart can resist. Then, like Peter, casting away the garments which incommode and restrain us, we will walk to him on the waters free and disengaged: yes; we will walk to him courageously across the boisterous ocean of the world, and pass over with ease the numerous rocks and shelves which oppose our entrance into the harbour of eternal bliss.

3. Far different from the obstacles which I have combated above is the erroneous opinion of those Christians who imagine that they can save their souls without extraordinary exertions. This error is less plausible, but is more universal and more difficult to be corrected. Its unhappy advocates can discover nothing in the gospel that condemns the maxims of self-love. Being of an easy and heedless disposition, they form to themselves a plan of virtue, in which are included, under borrowed names, ambition, luxury, vanity, pleasures,

and sometimes even the softer passions: their regularity consists more in avoiding excess than in doing good.

But, my brethren, be not deceived. Truth assures us that salvation is a work of difficulty, and that Heaven is gained only by violence. Behold the just man in the recesses of his obscure retreat—his countenance pale and disfigured—his body weakened and emaciated by the rigours of mortification and penance—his soul purified by long and fervent prayer. Listen to his sighs; he conjures the Lord not to enter into judgment with his servant; in the bitterness of his soul, and with floods of tears he recals to mind the comparatively trifling faults of his past life; faults into which perhaps he was led by surprise; he is alarmed; he trembles; he is unable to dissipate his fears, either by the consideration of the boundless mercies of his God, or by the view of his own numberless good works, all of which appear imperfect and devoid of merit in his eyes.

The wisdom of God has employed the strongest terms to enforce the great maxim of Christian piety, that penance and the cross are as indispensable as the sacrament of regeneration; and that it is equally impossible to be a true Christian without self-denial as it is to be a true Christian without baptism. This is the language of the whole gospel.

It is not, however, surprising that the world should form erroneous ideas on this subject. The world is made up of error and deceit; and never from the beginning has it possessed the power of forming a right judgment on the things which relate to God and religion. But, unfortunately, this illusion has its partisans even among those who follow virtue. There are many who imagine that they comply with all the duties of Christian piety by attending regularly to their prayers, and frequenting the sacraments at stated times; although at the same time they are hasty, passionate, vain, tepid, and worldly-minded. There are others who flatter themselves with the idea of having attained perfection merely because they are devout at times, because they occasionally give an alms, perform an act of mortification, and devote a few hours to prayer and meditation: although the whole of their piety is little better than caprice, and the greater part of their time devoted to vanity and pleasure.

Too true it is, that the spirit of religion is little known, even by those who profess to follow its maxims. God requires of us, not a part only of our hearts, not a few moments only of our lives, but he demands our whole hearts; he requires that all our desires and actions be referred to him: he will not be satisfied unless we comply with all the precepts of the

gospel. Attend to this essential point: be faithful to God, and then you may hope for everything from his mercy: you may confidently expect to enjoy true happiness, at least as much as human nature is susceptible of, during the time of your mortal pilgrimage; and you may look forward with hope to the possession of his promises in the mansions of eternal felicity.

XLI.—THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE TRIALS WHICH ATTEND PIETY IN THIS LIFE.

"The God of all grace,....after that you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you."—1 *Pet.*, v, 10.

This is the cheering prospect which the chief apostle holds out before the suffering disciples of Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, the followers of the gospel were exposed to the greatest trials: their lives and property were at the mercy of the most cruel and relentless tyrants: they were liable every hour to be seized and condemned to the torture, or sentenced to be torn in pieces by wild beasts, for the amusement of the populace: like lambs in the midst of wolves, they were objects of hatred and contempt to the whole world. In the midst of these perils and sufferings, the apostle comforts them with the assurance that the God of all grace will quickly put an end to their pains, and give them tranquillity and peace.

We, my beloved, are not exposed to the like trials; but we have sufferings of a different kind. Whether we follow virtue or not, sufferings are unavoidable: the man of the world must suffer from the tyranny of his passions and from other causes: the just man must suffer from the constant struggle which is required to keep his passions in subjection, and from the weariness and discontent which are sometimes experienced in a life of piety. But after "he has suffered a little, the God of all grace will himself perfect him, and confirm and establish him."

That you may not be discouraged from entering the paths of holiness by the fear of being exposed to extraordinary trials and difficulties, I will call your attention to this subject, and will prove, first, that uneasiness, satiety, and disgust are common to every situation in life: secondly, that the trials of the virtuous are not so severe as they are generally supposed to be; and thirdly, that they are not so severe as those of the worldling, because they are attended with consolations

and delights, which are never experienced in the ways of vanity.

1. Trials and sufferings are unavoidable in this life. The soul of man is formed for the enjoyment of God, and she cannot be happy until she is immersed in the ocean of the Divinity. She is, therefore, necessarily in a state of uneasiness and constraint during the time of her sojourning on earth: she is always seeking for happiness, and cannot find it: she cannot find it in the enjoyment of created things, because she was formed for a more noble destiny: she cannot find it in the service of God, because, not being in the full enjoyment of him, she always experiences that there is something wanting to satisfy her desires.

If happiness were attainable on earth, it would be attainable in the service of God, because religion softens the asperity of the passions, moderates the restless desires of the breast, gives ease and tranquillity to the afflicted mind, and imparts a foretaste of that perfect happiness which is reserved for the faithful servant in the mansions of the blessed. Of all the states and conditions in life, that of holiness approaches the nearest to felicity; but as it is only the path which leads to perfect felicity, and not felicity itself, man must necessarily remain in this life in a state of comparative anxiety and solicitude.

With what appearance of reason, then, can we complain that the paths of virtue are strewed with thorns? If the world imparted happiness to its followers, we might, perhaps, be allowed to accuse God of ill-treating his servants, and of being a less kind and indulgent master than the world. But examine every state; interrogate every sinner; consult, one after another, the partisans of the different pleasures which the world affords, and of the different passions which it inspires; consult the envious, the ambitious, the voluptuous, the trifler, the revengeful. Ah! they will all complain: they will all say that they are not happy: they will all declare that their moments of uneasiness and pain are far more numerous than their moments of pleasure.

But why does God leave his faithful servants in a state that is painful to nature? My friends, he has important reasons for it. It is by the means of these sufferings that our affections are to be weaned from this world, and that our thoughts and desires are to be raised up to those eternal mansions where sorrow and mourning are no more. If virtue were always attended with sensible consolations, it would receive its reward on earth. The Christian would enter into the service of God with the view, not so much of preparing himself

for the good things of eternity, as of acquiring peace and happiness on earth. The Lord would have only mercenary and selfish adorers, who would present themselves before him, not to carry his yoke, but to repose under the shadow of his cross—workmen, who would offer themselves, not so much to bear the heat and fatigues of the day in his vineyard, as to regale themselves with its fruits.

The just man lives by faith. Now, faith looks forward to some invisible good, of which we are not as yet in complete possession. It gives us no immediate hold of the objects which it sets before us. Its views are all essentially prospective. His country, his pleasure, his inheritance, his kingdom, are all of this kind. This is not his day: he looks for nothing here. The present time is the time of tribulation and anguish: the earth is the land of exile and sorrow. Why therefore should we seek after ease and comfort in a place where everything reminds us of our unhappy lot; where we are exposed to innumerable dangers; where, unless we use the greatest circumspection, every hour will increase the treasure of wrath which we have already heaped up against the day of wrath.

If real happiness could be found at a distance from God, our infidelity would appear to have an excuse; but the world is attended with disgust and bitterness, as well as piety: were we to exchange masters, we should only exchange one species of sufferings for another. The world, I allow, has a more pleasing exterior than piety; but this is all; its pretended delights are nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit. Since, therefore, we must necessarily carry the yoke either of the world or of religion, is there any room for hesitation? Is it not better to suffer for a reward than to suffer for nothing?

2. The sufferings, however, of the virtuous man are not so grievous as the worldling supposes. Although we acknowledge that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; although we say that the present life is the time for bringing forth the new man—the time of labour and travail, we do not mean to insinuate that piety is either burthensome or insupportable. The interests of truth require that we should speak a very different language; for were piety of no other service than merely to repress the tyranny of our passions, to free us from the galling yoke of the world, and to raise us above its hopes and fears, its agitations and vicissitudes; were this, I say, the only privilege belonging to piety, what state on earth would be preferable to it? In point of real worth, would it not far outweigh any of the pleasures of earth? Would it not be infinitely more agreeable to mourn with the children of God,

than to participate in the insipid and puerile joys of the children of iniquity?

But piety has many other advantages. It reconciles the mind to the miseries and afflictions which are inseparable from mortality. It subjects the heart to the will of God: it causes us to discover, in the hand that chastises us, the hand of a tender father, who has no other object in view than our salvation. Now, what can be more desirable in this land of exile and misery, where every day is distinguished by new afflictions and disappointments—where every desirable object seems to fly from our embraces—where our friends, our relations, our protectors, are daily snatched away and hurried into the grave—where nothing is certain, nothing is permanent; what can be more desirable than the state which administers the sweetest consolations on these trying occasions? what can be more desirable than the state in which the soul reposes in calm tranquillity, and the mind is undisturbed and unchanged in the midst of the incessant changes which everywhere take place around her?

Besides, the sufferings peculiar to the virtuous man consist of nothing more than the repugnance or antipathy that is felt in fighting against the inclinations of corrupt nature, in resisting the impetuosity of the passions—those fatal sources of all our guilt and all our evil. I am far from thinking that a conflict like this can be kept up, or that our disorders can be cured, without a struggle. I know that the struggle is great, and that the remedy is painful. At the same time, I am very sure that evils are avoided by this means, which are far more insupportable. The sword of the spirit—that only instrument by which our cure can be radically effected—is, I own, sharp and penetrating, and goes to the quick; but it goes there only to let out the imposthume which our corruption had engendered within us, and the remainder of our lives is ease and comfort. The labours and constraints of worldlings are endless and unprofitable; they add fuel to the flames which already consume them; they increase the turbulence of their passions, and avail them nothing in the end. But the conflicts of the virtuous man advance the great work of sanctification: they add an increase of glory to his soul; they animate and strengthen his good desires; and they impart the sweetest consolation to his mind—a consolation which abundantly repays him for all his labours.

I might add, that the repugnance and disgusts which attend the conflicts of the just are not created by virtue itself, but by the passions. In virtue all is amiable; and if our hearts had not been led astray by created things, the pleasures of innocence

would have been our only delight. But we have been accustomed from our infancy to look to the world for pleasure and enjoyment; our parents did the same before us, and by their example encouraged us to adopt their ideas. The sprightliness, likewise, of our disposition throws a gloom over the walks of recollection and retirement; the vehemence of our passions give a disrelish for the calm uniformity of religious duties; and the frivolous maxims which we hear, the chimerical adventures of romances which we read, and the pompous exhibitions of the theatre, or of other public places of resort, which are our delight, turn away our minds from everything that is serious and important. How, then, is it possible that we should find pleasure in the service of God, when the only sources of our pleasure have been hitherto the vanities and trifles of the world! We complain of the restraints of piety, when, in fact, the only obstacles that impede us are those which we ourselves have industriously set up, by the irregularity of our disorderly pursuits.

3. But allowing, for the sake of argument, that the service of God is irksome and painful to nature, still I contend that it is far preferable to the service of the world. For, my beloved, what is the life of the worldling? Let the opinion which he entertains of it himself be solemnly inquired into, and he will tell you that he is a stranger to true peace and joy: that he is a man of sorrows: that the variety of his pleasures creates only a variety of disquietudes and disgusts: that his life is frequently a burthen to him: that his days are spent in an insipid round of visits, of company, of amusements, of trifles, which have lost their novelty, and afford him no other satisfaction than that of passing away in a useless and insipid manner the time which would otherwise hang heavy on his hands: he will tell you, that in his soul there are a constant flux and reflux of hatreds, of desires, of disappointments, of jealousies, of hopes, which embitter all his pleasures, and which will not suffer him to be content with himself, although surrounded by everything which the world can afford.

Such is the state of the worldling. What comparison, then, can be formed between the tumultuous agitations of the passions and the trifling but consoling pains of virtue—between the excruciating torments of remorse, and the pleasing sorrows of repentance, with the promise which they hold out to us of immortal happiness? My God! is it possible that the man who has known the world should complain of thy service! Is it possible that thy yoke should appear heavy to him who has borne the yoke of his passions. Ah! the thorns

which thou hast scattered over the hallowed paths of virtue are flowers when compared with those with which the ways of the world and of vice are strewed on every side.

How frequently do the advocates and followers of vanity exclaim against this very world which they serve? How frequently do they lament their unhappy lot? How frequently do they cast the severest reproaches on its ingratitude and injustice? How frequently do they censure, condemn, and despise it, and declare that it is insupportable? But, my beloved, when is the man of piety ever known to cast invectives on virtue—to condemn and despise it, or lament that he has entered a path that is so beset with labours and sorrows? How frequently does the world itself envy the lot of the just man, and declare that he alone is truly happy? But where is the just man who envies the lot of the worldling—who applauds the choice that he has made—who declares that he alone is happy, and who considers himself as one of the most unfortunate and wretched of mankind? Frequently have sinners been driven by disgust of the world and by despair to the most fatal extremities: frequently have they lost their peace of mind, their health, their reason, and their life: frequently have they fallen into a state of the most gloomy melancholy, and have considered existence as their greatest torment. But what just man has ever been hurried by the sufferings of virtue into such terrible extremes? The best of men may sometimes be heard to exclaim, in the words of our Saviour: "How am I straitened until my salvation be accomplished,"—*Luke* xii, 50: but the restraints of holiness they prefer before all the pleasures of vice. It is true, they sometimes seek for a greater share of comfort from above, and it is natural they should: but the consolations of this world are things which they utterly despise. They suffer, but the hand which inflicts the punishment upholds them, and guards them against temptations which are above their strength. They feel what you call the weight of the yoke of Jesus; but when they reflect on the heavy weight of the yoke of iniquity which they formerly endured, they bless God for the happiness they now enjoy, and are convinced that their present sufferings are comparatively light and easy.

In fact, the trials of the just man are, for the most part, crosses which he voluntarily places on his own shoulders, and on that account are infinitely more supportable than the crosses of the world, which are never voluntary. The sufferings of the virtuous are painful only to the senses; they never affect the soul; they are insupportable only to the tepid and slothful. The distaste which is felt for the exercises of piety, is felt

only in the beginning of a new life; it soon wears off, and is succeeded by the most pure tranquillity and delight. The more ardently a Christian devotes himself to the service of God, the lighter will be the repugnance and the difficulty he will have to encounter. Whereas the sufferings of the worldling are constantly on the increase. The more ardently he devotes himself to the service of the world, the more is he tormented by satiety, irksomeness, and disgust.

In a life of piety there is no pain without its consolation: there is no repugnance or disgust, but what is amply compensated for by interior delights. Look into the heart of the just man. Behold the serenity within him—a soul unruffled, and a conscience that is always clear. The worm of remorse is destroyed, and the weight of iniquity taken away. In the midst of suffering and distress he knows that every pang, every sigh is recorded in the book of life, and an eternal reward assigned to them all. He is submissive without reserve to the will of his tender Father, because he knows that in all his dispensations he consults the good, and not the inclinations of his faithful servant. He is enriched with heavenly graces, which uphold and strengthen him in every trial and temptation. His piety is nourished, and his soul is enraptured by the solemnization of the mysteries of religion, and particularly by the great mystery of love—the Holy Eucharist. His confidence is enlivened by the scriptures, which declare that mourning and tribulation are the inheritance of the elect in this life. His patience is increased by the examples of the saints, who were all proved by the same spiritual dryness and by the same trials. But above all, his hopes are animated by the inexpressible delight with which he looks forward to the happy state which awaits him hereafter: the prospect of the great ocean of eternity makes all that passes with time appear little and contemptible.

Oh! what abundant resources are there in store for the faithful Christian! What a disproportion between the sufferings of virtue and those of vice! How sensibly is this difference felt, and how sincerely is it acknowledged by those who, after having devoted their early days to the world and to the gratification of their passions, have been reclaimed to the paths of holiness! With what sentiments of gratitude do they bless the mercies of the Lord! and with what regret do they exclaim with St. Augustine: "Too late have I known thee, O ancient truth! too late have I loved thee, O ancient beauty!"

Happy the man who has been disabused without the help of experience, and who has discovered, without the loss of innocence, the vanity of the world, and the wretched slavery

which attends the unrestrained indulgence of the passions. Alas! since we must at length be undeceived, and be compelled to despise and abandon the world: since the day *will* come when we shall discover that its pleasures are empty, disgusting, and insupportable: since the day *will* come when, of all its senseless joys, nothing will remain but anguish and remorse, why should we not tear ourselves in time from the misery which all such reflections as these will infallibly occasion? Why not perform to-day what we hope and intend to perform hereafter, when the difficulty of the execution will be increased an hundred-fold? Why wait, before we apply the remedy, till the wounds which the world continues to inflict on our souls are almost incurable?

Ah! we complain of the trivial difficulties to which religion subjects us; but, my dear brethren, what did the primitive Christians endure? They sacrificed wealth, honour, property, and life: they ran to tortures and to the rack: they passed their days in chains, in dungeons, in sufferings, and ignominy: they were not dismayed at the sight of death in its most frightful shapes: they were prepared to die, either by the beasts, by the fire, or by the sword. And did they complain in the midst of these complicated dangers and sufferings? Far from it. They rejoiced that they were found worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. They thought that they purchased at too cheap a rate the honour of being his disciples, and the consolation of being entitled to his eternal promises. And we, surrounded by all that our hearts can desire, subjected only to the restraints of self-denial, and to sufferings which are not worthy of being mentioned, we complain! Oh! let us blush and be confounded at the sight of our pusillanimity and cowardice.

Let our complaints be for ever hushed; and let us serve God in the manner that he wills us to serve Him. If he lighten the yoke, let us bless his mercies for this tender regard to our weakness: if it be his will that we endure the whole weight, let us esteem ourselves happy that he consents even at that price to receive our homage, and admits us to his friendship. Let us reflect that, notwithstanding the repugnance and dryness which the virtuous sometimes endure, there is no true pleasure but in the service of God, no real consolation but in the delights of holiness. Yes: better would it be to eat the bread of wormwood with the fear of the Lord, than to revel in all the festive sports and merriments of the world at a distance from him. Let us then embrace a life of virtue: it will impart to us the greatest happiness that can be enjoyed on earth, and lead us to the mansions of complete and never-ending felicity in the kingdom of Heaven.

XLII.—FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON AFFLICTIONS.

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."—*Rom.* viii, 18.

What consolation, my brethren, do these words impart to the suffering Christian! What motives do they suggest for patience and resignation! What inducements do they hold out to take up, with alacrity and joy, the cross of Christ, and to walk after him in the path which leads through afflictions to peace and happiness.

To suffer, or not to suffer, is not left to our choice: all that is left to us is, to derive merit from our sufferings; and to encourage us in the painful trial, we are assured that our sufferings will not be worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us. The providence of God has so mingled with bitterness all the sweets and comforts of life, that there is no enjoying the one without tasting a considerable portion of the other. There is no perfect happiness on earth, because the earth is not our permanent resting place. Every path is strewed with thorns. The man who has attained the highest pinnacle of worldly splendour and ambition, is a prey to cares and solicitudes which embitter all his enjoyments. The state of opulence is surrounded with as much anxiety as the state of poverty: the gilded palace is the scene of as much unhappiness as the meanest cottage.

Nevertheless, doomed as we are to suffer, we refuse to reap advantage from our sufferings. We are ingenious in devising the means of depriving ourselves of the merit of patient endurance. At one time, we imagine that our weakness is incapable of supporting affliction: at another, that our afflictions far surpass those of others: at another, that, in the midst of sufferings, it is impossible to apply to the great affair of salvation. I will examine these various excuses, and I hope that my reflections will convince you of the truth of my text, "that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."

1. The first excuse for our impatience under the ordinary afflictions we meet with, is generally drawn from our natural weakness. We say that we are not capable of enduring

such severe trials with a cheerful countenance and a tranquil mind; that our feelings are delicate; that this indisposition which nature implanted in us, is our misfortune; and that it is reasonable to hope that the Lord will be more favourable to us on that account, and relax something of the severity of his law.

But, my beloved, when the Lord commanded his followers to bear with patience and submission the crosses which are appointed for them, he made no exception in favour of those who are tender and delicate, any more than for those who are strong and vigorous. The precepts of the gospel are intended to be the remedy of our weakness; and the more we are averse to the observance of them, the more necessary they are for us. If we were constitutionally patient, trials would be unnecessary; but because we are weak, because we are ruffled by the least contradiction, and impatient under the most trifling affliction, it is precisely on that account that we are oftentimes visited with the severest trials.

But what is this weakness, this sensibility which we allege as a cover for our impatience? It is nothing less than an excessive love of ourselves—a love which will not allow us to offer any violence to our inclinations, and which places its happiness in nothing but the gratification of its own humour. This is our weakness: and if, in such a state, God had not visited us with afflictions, if he had not thwarted our inordinate desires of wealth by losses and failures, if he had not humbled our self-love by contradictions and affronts, our virtue would long since have been lost; and had the object of our petition been granted, instead of the fancied happiness we were so eagerly in pursuit of, we would have seen to our sorrow that we had incurred a real evil.

Our weakness, therefore, arises from the weakness of our faith. The true Christian, whatever may be the natural state of his feelings, is steadfast, resolute, and courageous; superior, as the apostle observes, to persecutions, reproaches, infirmities, and even death itself. Nay, he even rejoices in tribulations; he considers them as the evident marks of God's special providence over him, the pledges of future promises, the means of walking in the footsteps of his suffering Jesus, and the sure road to everlasting happiness.

That some are born with more exquisite feelings than others is very certain. But, then, the man who is more easily affected by misfortune may be more easily affected by the consolations of religion: the same sensibility which exposes his heart to the shafts of affliction ought likewise to open a free access to the soothing balm of grace and love. For

murmuring and impatience, therefore, however we may plead the natural softness of our temper and disposition, there can be no excuse.

Resignation in the time of trial, I allow, is attended with difficulty; but this is no more than what attends the observance of the other precepts of the gospel. It is very hard to pardon an injury, and to love those who hate us. It is very difficult to renounce the world, and to be poor in spirit in the midst of affluence. It is very difficult to conquer ourselves, to suppress the rising motions of the soul, to keep within the bounds of duty, and to be always on the watch. It is very difficult to deny ourselves, to take Heaven by violence, and, like the labourers in the vineyard, to bear the burden of the day and the heats. These, and all the other precepts of the gospel are difficult, for they are all imbued with the spirit of mortification and the cross: and if, at any time we relax in our exertions to comply with them, in that moment we are overpowered. If, therefore, we say that we are unable to repress the murmurs of impatience, we tacitly acknowledge that the gospel is above our strength, and we might as well say that we are unable to observe the precepts of chastity, humility, charity, and sobriety.

But, however great may be our weakness, it is our duty to place our confidence in God. He will not suffer us to be tempted above our strength. He will proportion our crosses to our infirmities, and will himself assist us to carry the yoke which he places on our shoulders. He punishes as a father, and not as a judge: he inflicts the wounds, but he is prepared to apply immediately the healing balsam. He knows what is necessary for us; and in the dispensation of afflictions, he seeks not our ruin, but our salvation.

Could any except wise motives induce the Lord of mercy to chequer the path of life with miseries and pains? Is he a cruel God that delights in the misfortunes of his creatures; or can it be imagined that it is at all necessary to his happiness that we should be left to a state of suffering? Oh, no! he never chastises us but with a view to our greater happiness; and even at the time that his indignation appears to be most enkindled against us, like a tender and loving parent, he remembers that we are his children, and he is filled with commiseration at the sight of the wounds which his love of justice, and the tender concern which he feels for our future welfare, oblige him to inflict upon us. His object is (and it is all that we have to look to) that through the momentary tribulations of this life we should escape from eternal punishments. Never is he more amiable or more kind than when

he appears to be the most severe. Ah! how beneficial, how necessary must afflictions be, when it can suit the nature of so mild and beneficent a Being as this to have recourse to them for the benefit of the most beloved and most favoured of all his creatures.

Be no longer discouraged by the idea of your weakness. The Lord is your strength. It is his delight to choose the weak things of this world, and the things that are not, in order to show forth the powers of his might. His apostles were weak and timid when he exposed them in the midst of ravenous wolves. The weakness and timidity even of the tenderest virgins have been converted into strength as a testimony of the power and efficacy of his grace. Enter therefore into the designs of his wisdom; and your weakness, instead of being brought forward as a justification of your complaints, will become your sweetest consolation in the hour of trouble and adversity.

2. Another very ordinary excuse for murmuring and impatience is drawn from the peculiar nature and excessive weight of our afflictions. We are always inclined to believe that our crosses are different from those of others: and lest the example of their longanimity and piety should condemn our pusillanimous conduct, we endeavour to justify the dissimilarity of our behaviour by the dissimilarity of our condition. We imagine that we could patiently endure afflictions of any other kind, but that those to which we are subjected admit of no consolation. The more we examine what passes in the world, the more singular do our misfortunes appear in our eyes; and we conclude by observing that it is a difficult thing to preserve an evenness of temper in a state which is rendered intolerable by a thousand distressing circumstances to which others are utter strangers.

But, to divest self-love of this feeble pretext, it will be sufficient only to observe, that the more extraordinary our sufferings are, the more clearly we may perceive the secret and impenetrable designs of God—the more confidently we may presume that he has many mercies in store for us, and that, since he leads us through such unfrequented and rugged ways, he will not suffer us to perish with the multitude.

Singular afflictions are, in the eyes of faith, a consolatory distinction. In every age God has conducted his chosen servants, in respect to sufferings, as well as to other things, by new and unbeaten paths. Read the histories of Noah, of Joseph, of Moses, of Job, of the apostles, of the just in every age and country, and you will see that they all passed through tribulations of the most extraordinary kind. The

less your afflictions, therefore, resemble those of other men, the more you have reason to rejoice and to hope that, as you partake of the lot of the just in this life, so you will be united with them in the next.

If your afflictions were only slight and momentary, they would not produce the desired effect—they would not wean your hearts entirely from the world, nor fix them solely on God; your sorrows would be forgotten as soon as past, and you would return to your former vanities and pleasures with greater ardour than ever. God, therefore, who knows the dispositions of your hearts, endeavours to prevent your return to the world, by visiting you with afflictions which will admit of no other consolation than that which is inspired by religion; and he suffers these afflictions to continue that your hearts may be for ever fastened to the cross, and indissolubly united to him. What, reason, then, have you to complain? Great sufferings are the effect of singular mercies of God. Your disorders stand in need of severe remedies; and the less you are spared, the more speedy will be your cure. Rather exclaim, with holy Job: In the painful state in which thy providence has placed me, O Lord, it is my sweetest consolation to reflect that thou dost not spare me, and that thou attendest more to my salvation that to the pusillanimous desires of my heart.

If the arguments I have adduced be not sufficient to hush the murmurs of complaint, then I would advise you to enter into judgment with the Lord. Consider impartially how matters stand between you and the Almighty. On one side, consider your crimes; and on the other, your afflictions. Compare the severity of your punishment with the enormity of your offences: and if you discover that the Lord has exceeded the bounds of justice, boldly reprove him; raise your voice, and let your complaints be heard. Hitherto you have compared what you suffer with what you are content to suffer; now, at least, compare it with what you deserve to suffer. Gracious God! what a reckoning is here, in the innumerable, reiterated offences you have committed, each of which is deserving of an eternity of woe! and you have the folly, or rather the audacity to murmur against the mercies of a God who is desirous of commuting these never-ending torments for short and trivial sufferings—sufferings, which may be alleviated and sweetened by the consolations of piety and religion.

Wretched and infatuated men! you are attached to sin, and ask for blessings! But, wo to your unhappy souls, should the Lord in his anger grant your petition. God is terrible in his

gifts, as well as in his wrath. Sin must be punished, either here or hereafter. And if the Lord should exempt you from sufferings in this world, be assured that he would reserve them all for the next. No state is so alarming as to be a sinner, and to live free from affliction and pain.

It may not, however, be unseasonable to inquire, whether your afflictions are in reality so great as you represent them? It too frequently happens, that the violence of passion occasions the acuteness of our sufferings, and that the excessive grief we feel for the loss of property, friends, or reputation, arises from the inordinate warmth of our attachment to them. It too frequently happens, likewise, that every thing which relates to ourselves appears great and extraordinary: the idea, too, of our being singularly afflicted flatters our vanity, at the same time that it seems to justify our complaints. We in some degree expect that the whole circle of our acquaintance should express as much concern for us as if we were the greatest sufferers on earth. But, my beloved brethren, had we learned to estimate the afflictions of others, how different would be our sentiments! Were we capable of ascertaining the truth, we should perhaps discover that our afflictions are far inferior to those of the greater part of mankind. We enjoy consolations of many kinds to which other people are strangers; and were we to weigh in an even balance our crosses and our enjoyments, we should be convinced that there was more danger to be apprehended from the multiplicity of our temporal comforts, than fruit to be expected from the variety of our afflictions.

Let us from time to time enter the cottage of destitute and unprotected poverty, where modest bashfulness and resignation conceal from the public eye miseries and distresses of which we have hitherto had no conception. Let us visit the asylum of charity—the public hospitals, where all the evils incident to human nature seem concentrated. There we may form a just idea of our own afflictions: there, with a heart bleeding at the sight of so many woes, we shall blush to give the name of woe to the sufferings that have fallen to our lot: there, our murmurs against Heaven will be changed into canticles of thanksgiving; or rather, the view of the multiplied crosses from which we have been preserved will induce us to dread the lenity of a just and injured God, instead of complaining of severity.

Let us therefore hush every murmur of impatience, and particularly let us renounce the unchristian idea that afflictions are a sufficient excuse for neglecting the business of salvation.

3. Every affliction is sent by a merciful God for the express

purpose of promoting our sanctification. How astonishing is it, therefore, that a Christian should take occasion from thence to murmur against the wisdom and goodness of God, and accuse him of imposing crosses on his shoulders which prevent his application to his eternal welfare. And yet nothing is more common. When we exhort a wretched sufferer to take advantage of his momentary tribulations, and by patient endurance to merit Heaven, he replies that, in the midst of such distress, he is incapable of serious reflection; that the pains and contradictions which assail him on every side, irritate his mind and distract his thoughts, instead of recalling him to a proper sense of duty and religion; and that he must be tranquil and composed before he can apply his thoughts to meditation and prayer.

Of all the pretexts which are alleged by the impatient, this is at once the most criminal and the most irrational. It is the most criminal, because it is little less than blasphemy against Providence, by insinuating that he has placed us in a state incompatible with the means of salvation. Everything which the Almighty does, or suffers to be done, he does or suffers to be done for no other purpose than to facilitate the ways of eternal life. Every event is intended by him to promote our sanctification. The whole world itself is only a preparatory place for the world to come. All that passes away has a secret connection with that eternal duration when nothing will pass away. The world is, on no other consideration, worthy the providential care of a wise and merciful God, than because its revolutions are the means of forming the Church in Heaven. He acts in time with a view only to eternity. To pretend, therefore, that he has placed us in a state which not only prevents, but is incompatible with our eternal interests, is, in fact, blaspheming against his adorable wisdom, and reducing him to the rank of a subordinate being by limiting his power to this world.

This pretext is likewise irrational; for no sinner can return to God unless he withdraw his affections from the world; and never is he so effectually enabled to withdraw his affections from this miserable world, says St. Augustine, as when the Lord mixes bitterness and sorrow in the chalice of his pleasures. Lord, exclaims the prophetic king of Juda, I forgot thee in my prosperity and abundance. The pleasures of royalty had corrupted my heart; but thou hast stricken me by pouring forth the cup of thy wrath on my people, and by the other severe afflictions which I have endured. Thou hast stricken me, and I am awakened; thou hast humbled me, and I am returned to thee.

This is the most natural effect produced by tribulations. They facilitate every duty, and by causing us to experience both the treachery and the weakness of creatures, and the vanity and emptiness of the world, enable us with ease to withdraw our affections from them, and fix them totally on God.

Come then, my Christian brethren, let us pour forth the sorrow of our hearts before the throne of grace and consolation. Under the shadow of the cross, we may forget our woes, our tribulations, and our sighs. Hitherto we have indulged the feelings of human anxiety and impatience; a thousand times have we wished that the eternal wisdom of God would bow down to the senseless projects of our hearts; that he would adopt and follow our plans—guide us through this life by the paths that would be most agreeable to us. Senseless mortals! as if we were wiser and better acquainted with the things that are for our peace, than the Great Sovereign Lord of all, in whose hands alone are truth and judgment.

Never have we entered into the designs of his providence as they regard our everlasting happiness. Never have we maturely considered, that the afflictions which he sends are the means by which he proposes that we should work out our salvation. Let us, for the time to come, throw ourselves without reserve into his arms: in the meditation of his holy law, and in submission to his eternal decrees, let us seek that permanent consolation which we have never found in the enjoyment of creatures, and which will not only alleviate all our tribulations on earth, but will also insure to us an eternal recompense in the kingdom of Heaven.

XLIII.—FEAST OF SS. PETER AND PAUL.

ON SAINTS PETER AND PAUL.

"You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth."—*Acts*, i, 8.

With what fidelity were these injunctions of our Lord fulfilled by the great apostles whose festival we this day celebrate! With what undaunted courage did they publish the name of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria! With what unwearied perseverance do we behold them traversing kingdoms and empires, scattering the seeds of faith, and everywhere disseminating the inspired maxims of their crucified Jesus! With what invincible patience did they endure

imprisonments and stripes, perils by sea and perils by land, watchings and fastings, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, and finally death itself, in the cause of their Lord and Master! "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the whole world."—*Rom.*, x, 18.

But it is not by expatiating on the labours and sufferings of these great apostles, that I propose at present to recommend myself to your attention; my object is to show that we ourselves are bound to suffer. We, too, like the apostles, are called to be witnesses to Jesus; and although we are not all enjoined to preach the gospel in the hearing of surrounding multitudes, still it is the duty of every individual to give testimony to the truth by the innocence of his life and the purity and sanctity of his morals.

Man's life upon earth, we are told, is a constant warfare—a state of trial, of temptation, and of suffering; and it is by bearing up with untired patience and becoming fortitude against the various hardships to which all must necessarily be exposed who would live piously on earth, that we are to be martyrs and witnesses of Christ. In a spiritual sense we are required to die daily in the cause of our great Master. We must act in opposition to ourselves here, or we shall not be saved hereafter. These are the important lessons which above all other things, I wish particularly to inculcate.

1. The testimony which every Christian is bound to give to the truth, is not merely the exterior profession of his faith. No, my beloved; something more is required: Heaven is not gained by lifting up our hands, and saying: Lord, Lord. The testimony that he must give is of a painful nature—a a testimony that is not belied by actions at the time that it is outwardly professed—a testimony that acknowledges the divinity of Jesus by works as well as words—a testimony that does honour to religion, that glorifies the Lord, that sanctifies the creature, and that bears witness to the good things of the life to come by the voluntary sacrifice of present things; or in other words, a testimony of suffering, of submission, and of desire.

In the first place, without suffering we cannot give testimony that we are true followers of Christ. The apostles have unreservedly declared that we must be conformed to our suffering Jesus, that we must be chastised, and that we must enter into the kingdom of Heaven through many tribulations. These sufferings and tribulations are not merely the ordinary afflictions of life—such as pains of body, loss of friends, vexations, disappointments, solicitudes of poverty and want. By no means; for, although the patient endurance of these

is necessary, because they are the means of sanctification which the providence of God employs for the accomplishment of his designs either of mercy or justice on his chosen servants; yet we shall find that there are sufferings of another kind, which may be said to constitute the character of a true Christian. We shall find that there is a spirit of mortification and penance, which is to give testimony of our walking in the footsteps of our suffering Jesus, and of our being entitled to a share in his promises.

Besides this, there is a spirit of self-denial by which we are to be enabled to resist our passions, to repress our unlawful desires, to oppose our vicious inclinations, and to raise the edifice of grace and piety on the ruins of self-love. There is a mortification of the heart by which we are to be induced to pardon injuries, to love those who hate us, to speak well of those who calumniate us, to repress the sallies of anger, the impetuosities of temper, the swellings of vanity; to renounce the delusions of pride, the empty charms of pleasure, the dangers of familiar intercourse, the occasions of sin; and to take part on all occasions with religion and the gospel in opposition to the dictates of corrupt nature. There is a renunciation of self-will which is to cause us to be circumspect and watchful over the emotions of our hearts in the various occurrences of life, lest they be misled by friendship, sullied by hatred, corrupted by flattery, seduced by human respect, blinded by interest, defiled by envy, or led astray by dissipation—which is to cause us to be continually on our guard, lest we be lulled into a fatal security by indolence and by public example, lest we be induced to follow inclination instead of duty, and the abuses which the world attempts to justify, instead of the precepts which the gospel enjoins. There is a life of faith, which combats incessantly the law of the members urging to sensual enjoyments, and which discovers in almost every action, and every event, opportunities of practising self-denial and penance. And, lastly, there is a continual warfare in which every Christian must be engaged in order to save his soul, which consists in offering a holy violence to Heaven, in conquering ourselves, in reducing our rebellious inclinations into obedience to the law of God, in living for God alone in the midst of objects which allure us to seek only ourselves, and in living as strangers in the world, notwithstanding its caresses and favours.

These are the sufferings which constitute the character of the true Christian. On the patient endurance of these, the possession of the kingdom of Heaven depends. We are not called to be apostles, to be martyrs, nor to live in a total

seclusion from the world. All have not these gifts; these honours are not conferred on every Christian. But to lead a crucified life, to mortify the passions, to deny our will, to imbibe the interior spirit of penance, is the vocation of every disciple of Jesus—is the first duty of religion—and is the grand leading principle, and, as it were, the soul and the essence of a Christian life. He that is faithful in these things is a martyr, that is, a witness of Christ; because by the continual self-denials which he practises in conformity to the precepts of the gospel, he bears testimony that Jesus is the God of his heart, that from him he expects his recompense, that he is the great judge over all his works, that his doctrine is the doctrine of life—the doctrine of salvation, and that the inheritance of his promises is preferable to the vain pleasures of the world, all of which he sacrifices in obedience to his will.

Now, then, let us look into ourselves, and examine whether we give this testimony to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Do we submit to inconveniences and fatigues rather than neglect the duties of religion? Do we prefer the delights of piety, the sweets of innocence, before the enjoyments of flesh and blood? Have we offered up the painful sacrifice of our passions? Have we laid up a store of self-denials and good works against that great day when we shall be summoned to give testimony of our faith, and to substantiate our claim to the kingdom of Heaven? Alas! to our eternal disgrace and confusion, may it not rather be said, that in the whole of our moral conduct, as it regards God and eternity, there is little or nothing which can distinguish us from those unhappy men who believe not in Christ, and to whom the doctrine of the cross still remains an impenetrable secret? May it not be said, that we are neither more patient, more chaste, more charitable, more rigid in our morals, more moderate in our pleasures, more equitable towards our brethren, more circumspect in our words, more disengaged in our affections from the world than the very heathens themselves who know not God—and that the only difference between us and them is, that professing as we do a law of sanctity unknown to them, we have the singular merit of being *more enlightened and worse men?*

2. In the second place, we are required to give testimony to Jesus by the submission of our understanding, and by the subjection of our will to his holy law. Submission of the understanding consists in believing the incomprehensible mysteries of revelation on the authority of the word of God, in captivating our reason to the obedience of faith, and

adoring in silence the awful secrets of Heaven. Faith assures us that the eye of mortal man is not able to penetrate into the regions of inaccessible light, and that any researches behind the veil which the Lord hath drawn before the sanctuary are presumptuous and vain. By submitting our understanding, therefore, we give testimony to the unerring authority of God; we acknowledge the impiety of scrutinizing into secrets, which eye hath not been permitted to explore, nor ear to hear; and we are restrained from mingling the vanity of our reasonings and the folly of our conjectures with the simplicity of Christian faith; we are induced to look down with pity and compassion on those deluded men, who measure everything by the standard of human respect, and who reject the authority of God by rejecting the authority of the Church he established; we are convinced that there is nothing so noble, so becoming a finite existence, as a total reliance on him who is infinite and eternal; and we are prepared not only to pay due respect and attention to the exterior ceremonies of divine worship, to the pious traditions of the apostles, and to the laws of the Church, but to show forth the sublimity of religion by the faithful performance of the lesser duties, and by declaring our belief that there is nothing degrading nor unprofitable in piety, except the exalting of ourselves above its rules and ordinances.

To this submission of the understanding we must add the subjection of the will, that is, we must resign ourselves to the providence of God, and be conformed to his holy will in all things: we must bear with patience the crosses which he is pleased to impose upon us: we must endure with calm tranquillity the infirmities of sickness, the injuries and affronts of enemies, the treachery of friends, and the loss of relations: we must submit to all occurrences which either mortify our pride or disappoint our expectations: in a word, we must refer every thing to a future state, and make all the evils of life subservient to the great business of salvation. This is submission of the will.

Happy, then, are you, my brethren (if you could but think it) whom Providence has consigned to a life of poverty and labour. So far from envying the lot of the affluent and powerful, so far from repining at the dispensations of Heaven, by which you are subjected to pain and toil, so far from yielding to impatience under the heat and burden of the day, to which you alone seem to be exposed, so far from supposing that you are wretched because you are poor, you have reason to bless the mercies of the Lord towards you. He has placed you in a state in which the will may be most easily

subjected to him, and salvation obtained with the least difficulty. He has placed you in a state in which fewer and less violent temptations are found than in any other. He has placed you in a state in which the paths of virtue are made plain and easy, and the road to eternity more uniform, and infinitely less intricate than in almost any other that can be thought of. He has placed you in a state which he himself calls a happy state, because the rich are obliged by the gospel to offer violence to themselves, and to descend to the same level in which you are, by renouncing voluntarily, and through motives of piety, those pleasures which you are not empowered to enjoy, by acquiring interiorly that spirit of poverty which you outwardly display, and by performing extraordinary works of penance in the place of those labours which you are necessitated to undergo. Yes, my beloved, reflect from time to time that life is short, and that every Christian is obliged to suffer tribulation during the period of his mortal existence: reflect on this, and you will soon acknowledge that the state which is the least calculated to fix our affections on this perishable world, which removes the farthest from our reach pleasures that tend only to corrupt the heart, which throws in our way the most frequent occasions of suffering, and which supplies the least fuel to the passions, you will soon acknowledge that such a state is the most favourable for the salvation of your souls, because in it every obstacle is removed that can impede, and every means provided that can hasten, the accomplishment of this desirable event. Reflect, likewise, that we must suffer either in time or eternity; that it is not the lot of many, or I might say that it is the lot of none, to be completely happy both in this world and the next; that both rich and poor will be on an equal footing before the tribunal of God; that they will be judged by the same laws; and that the true Christian will be distinguished, not by honours, titles, and riches, but by the real worth of his character, and the sterling merit of his performances, whatever his situation may have been below.

Thus we see that in every situation of life, whether in opulence or poverty, in health or in sickness, all are bound to give testimony to Jesus by patient suffering. But by whom is this testimony given? Do not the generality of Christians live as if there were no overruling Providence? Alas! is it not too true that we attribute none of the occurrences of life to him? and that we ascribe all our sufferings and misfortunes to no other cause than to the malice of enemies, to oppression and injustice of masters, to the treachery of false friends, or to the jealousy and opposition of competitors?

Does not our conduct denote that we seem to think that men are the rulers of the universe, that every thing which is to befal us depends on them, and that their passions are the primary sources from which all the vicissitudes and reverses of life proceed.

Be no longer deluded, Christian brethren; cast up your eyes to Heaven, and behold the Great Creator and Preserver of all. It is he who regulates the actions of men as far as they affect us, and makes use of them as instruments to promote our eternal welfare. He is the supreme and invisible Disposer of all things. Without his permission not a hair of our head falls to the ground. He ordained from all eternity even those events that seem to be the most sudden and the most extraordinary, and he ordained them for the purpose of promoting our sanctification. He sports with the vain wisdom of men, and makes them contribute to the completion of his designs by the very means which they had adopted with a view of frustrating them.

These are sublime reflections: these are Christian sentiments. They open an abundant source of consolation to the faithful soul. They raise him far above the reach of all human events. Truly, my beloved, if no other effect were produced by religion in the midst of the inevitable vicissitudes and tribulations of life, how pitiable is the state of the sinner who refuses to follow its maxims! No, in the whole range of the universe there is not a being to be found so truly wretched and senseless as the man who, building solely on his own strength, and rejecting all the friendly aids which religion is ready to hold out to him, is neither to be awed into submission by a sense of the duty which he owes to God, nor awakened to repentance by the solemn admonitions of a guilty conscience.

3. Lastly, we are bound to give our Lord Jesus the testimony of desire. Faith informs us that we are only strangers, and that there is no permanent dwelling-place to be found on earth; that the days of our pilgrimage are short and painful; and that Heaven is our only true country. Reflection, consequently, will inform us that it is our duty to sigh after this happy land which is shown to us from afar; to refer all our labours, all our solicitudes, all our works, desires, and thoughts, to that delightful term, and never to lose sight of that place of rest which is prepared for the people of God. It will inform us that it is our duty to use the world, and the things of the world, as if we had used them not; to consider nothing as properly our own, but that which we can possess for ever; to fix our affections on those things only which will

never pass away; to desire only those permanent possessions which will never be taken from us. It will inform us that it is our duty to lament our long sojourning in a place where we are constantly exposed to the most imminent dangers; where everything is calculated to inflame the passions, and nothing to satisfy them; where every object has a tendency to separate us from God; and where, the farther we are separated from him, the more we are insupportable to ourselves.

These are our duties—our indispensable duties—the first duties of a Christian. By the faithful performance of these, we are distinguished from the children of the world; and by the neglect of them, we become worse than infidels and unbelievers. In a word, so important are these duties, that, because the poor and the afflicted are enabled to perform them with the least difficulty, the kingdom of Heaven is declared by our Lord to be their peculiar inheritance. By poverty, however, is meant not merely the privation of riches, but the disengagement of the affections from them. He alone is poor, in the sense of the gospel, who is poor in spirit. The man who is discontented with his lowly state, who covets more than Providence has been pleased to give him, who fixes his affections on wealth, and is ready to sacrifice honour and conscience in order to obtain it; such a man is rich in spirit, at the time that he is poor by condition; he is unhappy, and he is criminal in the sight of God; he is obnoxious to the malediction which is frequently attached to riches, and he does not partake of their temporal comforts and advantages.

On the other hand, the rich man, who is not attached to the mammon of this world, who considers the possessions which Providence has entrusted to him as the means appointed for the exercise of charity, and for the acquisition of a title to the kingdom of Heaven; who is the comforter of the afflicted, and the reliever of the distressed; who is meek and humble of heart, and who prefers the fear of God, and the treasure of his grace, before all the riches of the earth; such a man is poor in spirit, and he partakes of all the blessings attached to poverty, without being exposed to its privations and inconveniences.

These, my beloved, are testimonies which religion exacts from us. In this manner, every Christian is obliged to be a witness of Jesus, and an apostle of the gospel. You are not called to announce his word to the nations that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; you are not called to forsake your country and friends; but you are called to mortify your passions through motives of piety, to accept with resignation

and peace the pains and afflictions of this life, to despise all that passes with time, and to be convinced that there is nothing worthy of your affections but the good things of eternity.

Thus it is that you are to partake of the glory and crown of the apostles. You sometimes envy the lot of those men who were favoured with the sight of our Lord on earth, and were made partakers of his admirable gifts. You may enjoy, if not the same, at least a degree of happiness. Make the sacrifice of your passions, and withdraw your affections from all created things; and then the presence of Jesus in your souls will replenish you with consolations above measure. What is there, then, to prevent us from walking in the footsteps of these holy apostles? Are we deterred by the difficulty? No; let us not think of that: we know that grace makes everything easy. If our happiness on earth would be promoted and increased by abandoning ourselves to the guidance of the passions, by impatience under afflictions, and by attachment to creatures, we should then have some excuse for our delay. But faith assures us, and we have learned it by experience, that the passions are the causes of all our evils; that repining under afflictions does but increase our sufferings; and that our attachment to this earth only adds to our slavery, by multiplying the chains which bind us to it. God requires nothing at our hands but what is useful and expedient. He exacts no duty from us but what we have an interest in performing. He promises that we shall enjoy happiness in piety, and he attaches to the observance of his law all that felicity which can be experienced in this life, and the possession of all that is delightful and promising in the next.

XLIV.—FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE GREAT DANGER OF FALLING INTO SIN, TO WHICH THE SOUL IS EXPOSED IN A STATE OF TEPIDITY.

"Except your justice exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."—*Matt.*, v, 20.

Were I to give a full and correct description of the moral and religious conduct of the men who are so severely censured by our Lord in the gospel of this Sunday, and compare it with the behaviour of the generality of Christians of the present times, it would appear that hardly an individual is to be found among us who can be said to equal, much less to exceed, the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, though even this,

we are admonished, would be far from being sufficient to entitle us to the possession of God's eternal kingdom. The character of this age is tepidity and remissness in the service of God. Men form to themselves a system of religious worship, which consists of little more than a listless attendance at public service. They hear the word of God; read over their usual prayers; but neither practise what they hear, nor attend with proper devotion to what they read. Their piety, like that of the Pharisees, is mostly external. If they avoid criminal excesses, they conclude that their salvation is not endangered. Although they entertain no sincere love for God, although they feel no horror for sin, and although they indulge their passions in smaller things without scruple or remorse, they imagine that the grace of God will be always at their command; and that they will be preserved in the hour of danger from that which they hate only on account of the eternal torments to which it will expose them.

But, my beloved, were we fully sensible of our weakness, and of our total dependence on God; and were we thoroughly convinced that grace is not to be obtained but by fervent prayer, and by earnest desires of leading a truly Christian life, we should clearly perceive that tepidity, remissness, and negligence in the service of God will infallibly expose the soul, at some future moment, to the danger of being overwhelmed in the time of temptation, and deprived of that extraordinary grace on the possession of which her security depends.

1. It is a fundamental article in our belief, that even those who are the most perfect stand in continual need of the assistance of divine grace. Our nature is not what it was originally. A sad and deplorable alteration has taken place since the time when man was created in innocence. Little remains of his original strength and vigour. His understanding is clouded with ignorance, and his will is depraved by the sensual appetite; equity and truth are no longer his inheritance; all his inclinations are in opposition to the will of God; he is dragged on, as it were, without any formal consent on his part, towards illicit enjoyments. The obedience and love, which are due to the law of God, cannot engage his attention, unless he use continual violence to obliterate the impressions caused by visible things, unless he resist his most lively desires, and unless he fight incessantly against himself. Every duty prescribed by the gospel is painful to flesh and blood: every command restrains some one or other of his propensities: every step in the way of virtue is taken with labour and difficulty.

In such a state as this, how arduous is the task of obedience! and how easy is it to transgress! To this weight of corruption may be added the snares with which he is beset on every side—the allurements of public example—the enervating influence of visible objects—the danger of being surprised in an unguarded moment—the trials which are occasioned by afflictions and injuries—and, in a word, the innumerable temptations with which he is constantly assailed during the whole course of his mortal life.

To these might be added the details of his own private weakness, and the peculiar aversion to the laws of piety and truth which he has contracted by former irregularities—that increased love of the world and its vanities—that distaste for prayer and religious exercises—that additional influence of the sensual powers—that insuperable sloth which is pained by every spiritual duty, and which is dismayed by every difficulty—that haughty spirit, which is neither to be bent nor broken—that inconstancy of mind, which is always eager for change, which is wearied by a repetition of the same duties, which is an enemy to uniformity of life and conversation, which, like the foolish man in the gospel, wills and wills not, and which frequently hurries the soul from one extreme to another, from excessive sadness to the most puerile mirth, and causes her to violate the strongest resolutions the moment after they were formed.

In the midst of such dangers, and surrounded by such powerful enemies, what will be the strength even of the strongest person imaginable, when left entirely to his own feeble exertions? Will he be able to stand, unprotected and alone? Will he be able to fight the good fight, and to resist the united attacks of the devil, the world, and his own inordinate passions? No, my beloved; his only security is in the grace and protection of the Lord of Hosts: it is he that must enlighten him in the shades of darkness: it is he that must support him in the hour of conflict, that must restrain the impetuosity of self-love, and that must shield him from the envenomed shafts of his powerful and inveterate enemies. If he be left to himself even for an instant, he will fall a victim to their malice: if he be not constantly upheld by that all-powerful hand, he will be borne down by the torrent that opposes him.

Our continuance, therefore, in the paths of virtue, is the effect of divine grace: every step that we take in the ways of God is in consequence of the motions of the Holy Spirit; and every good work that we perform owes its commencement and perfection to the mercies of God. Such is the weakness of

man, and such his dependence on the protection of his Maker. The grace of God is not only the reward of his fidelity, but it is the primary cause of his fidelity: grace is his strength; and the exertion of his strength is the only means of obtaining an increase of grace.

In fact, my beloved, is it not agreeable to the principles of equity that some order should be observed by Providence in the distribution of his spiritual gifts? And what order is it that justice prescribes? No other than that the Lord should communicate himself more abundantly to his creature in proportion to the zeal and fervour which he has manifested in his service; that he should afford a more constant protection, and shower down more abundant mercies on him who has given greater proofs of fidelity and love; and that he should bestow on him a reward proportioned to the profits which he had acquired by the talents entrusted to him. On the other hand, that he should be cold and reserved towards the unfaithful servant who is tepid and negligent in his service; and that he should turn away with disgust from the man who presents no other offering to him than what is calculated to excite his abhorrence.

This is the order prescribed by justice, and this is the order observed by Providence. We no sooner become cool and languid in his service, than he treats us with the same indifference; we no sooner begin to confine our attention to those essential duties which cannot be neglected without manifestly incurring the guilt of sin, than he begins to prescribe bounds to his mercies, and to impart to us only those general graces which he bestows promiscuously on all. He recedes from us in proportion as we recede from him; and he is favourable and beneficent to us in proportion as we are faithful to him.

This treatment on the part of God is founded, I again repeat, on principles of the strictest justice; and a little reflection on the general tenour of our conduct will show that such treatment as this is, in fact, all that we have a right to look to. For, how do we proceed? Why, we enter into judgment with our Lord; we sum up the several items of the debt we owe him, and knowing the consequences which must necessarily result from any deficiency on our part, are punctual in our payments, but never generous: our care is never to exceed. We seem to adopt in our intercourse with God (but with less justice) the language of the lord of the vineyard: "Friend, take what is thine, and go thy way: didst thou not agree with me for a penny a day?"

It is impossible to think that, when we have been thus ungenerous to God, the return which he will make to us in

the distribution of his favours will not be regulated on a principle that is nearly, if not precisely similar. It is not by restricting our endeavours in this partial and parsimonious manner to the mere outline of our duty, that we can ever hope to gain any ascendency in the divine favour. The friendship of the Great Creator is not to be purchased at so low a rate. No: the price of love is love. If we love God, he will love us: otherwise, he will reject and repudiate us. How far this great and invigorating principle of divine love is necessary for our steady advancement in the way of virtue, will be best ascertained by fixing your attention for a moment on the evil consequences which must always ensue from the cold indifference of those who are habitually in want of it.

The first great and lamentable evil that presents itself to our view, as the natural effect of this unhappy disposition, is, that it deprives the soul of the best, if not the only, means of defence, by cutting off all the more abundant supplies of divine grace, and leaving her without any other aid than what may be found in the ordinary helps and resources which the providence of God still continues to hold out in favour of those who have not as yet entirely abandoned him. I am far from disputing the superior efficacy of divine grace, even in the lowest measure of its distribution. I know that it is sufficient: but I contend that there must be some correspondent endeavours on our part; and where these endeavours are wanting, as to a certainty they will be wanting in a state of coolness and indifference, the effect which it will produce will be next to nothing. Much exertion will be necessary to regain the station which we had lost; and without this exertion we cannot be reinstated in it.

In the beginning, indeed, our condition will not be so bad. We may at first retain a due sense of modesty and of the fear of God; we may, perhaps, tremble at the idea of leading a wicked life; and by means of these considerations be enabled to fight for some time against our spiritual enemies. But these are only the efforts of weak nature, and will not continue long. Grace will daily have less effect on our minds; our faith will be weakened, and our charity will be cooled; our horror of sin will be diminished, and our love of the world will be increased; temptations will become more violent, and our means of resistance will be weakened; between us and sin there will be no other barrier than our own infirmity. What will follow from such a state as this may be easily foreseen.

Secondly, to him who is habitually tepid, the yoke of the Lord cannot fail of appearing at all times heavy and insup-

portable. In the present condition of our fallen nature, we look in vain for that warm sense of rectitude in the mind of man, those supereminent principles of truth and equity, with which he was constitutionally gifted in the days of his primeval innocence. All that was formerly great and good within him, is now sunk in the gratification of his inordinate and sensual appetite. Religion, which enjoins the surrender of present ease, as the appointed means of arriving at future happiness—religion is irksome and tedious to him; he feels the restraint which it occasionally lays him under; he feels the violence of the passions which agitate him within, and he is tired and tormented with the unequal contest. In such a state as this, if the God of all consolations does not stoop to visit and raise him up; if no interior comforts are made to spring up in his mind, to console him in his afflictions, and cheer him in the arduous conflict that is set before him, how is he to be supported?—how is he to come off with victory? Can such a thing be rationally expected? No, my beloved, it cannot.

Now, the tepid Christian is a stranger to these consolations, and consequently he is weighed down by the pressure of the yoke which is laid upon him. He performs all the works of piety with reluctance and disgust, because he is not in a proper disposition to relish them. He is obliged to offer continual violence to himself, because his repeated infidelities will not suffer him to taste the sweets of divine love. The most trivial self-denial or act of penance he performs with much difficulty and labour. He is not comforted by prayer; he is not exhilarated by retirement; his whole life is spent in a continued opposition to his inclinations and desires; he is on one side disgusted with the manna which the Lord commands him to eat, and on the other, he longs for, but dares not return to, the flesh-pots of Egypt, lest the Lord should inflict upon him the heavy judgments which his apostacy would deserve.

Such a state of constraint as this cannot be endured long: if piety cannot impart tranquillity and delight to the mind, it will soon be thrown off. So irksome a thing is it, and so very odious, to stop short in our plans, and to end in deciding nothing—to be neither a sinner nor a saint—neither a follower of the world nor a disciple of Christ—neither a man of pleasure nor a child of grace, that it is impossible such a state as this can last. Sooner or later it will have an end; and, generally speaking, it will end in ruin. The human heart must have some determinate object to interest and occupy its attention: if this object be not God, it will soon

be the world: it must have sentimental enjoyment of one kind or other: it must have pleasure; and if that pleasure be not derived from piety, it will be sought after in the haunts of wickedness.

I am not ignorant that there are many Christians who seem to linger on for a length of time in the state of spiritual indolence and tepidity; who have no ardour either for the world or for God—who, in the midst of sensual gratifications, seem to retain a regularity and uprightness of sentiment which has the appearance of virtue; and in the midst of their religious duties seem to be actuated by those lax and tepid principles which savour of the world and its maxims.

I am not ignorant that there are many among Christians of this description: nor am I ignorant (nor do I indeed wish that any of you should remain ignorant) that such Christians as this are virtuous only externally; every other way they are as thoroughly depraved as the worst of those who are libertines by profession. Their virtue consists in a prudent, circumspect behaviour in all matters of signal delinquency. They are careful not to commit themselves by any overt act of glaring licentiousness; at the same time that they do not scruple to defile their souls with the guilt of the concealed passions of jealousy, hatred, pride, vanity, and self-love; so that, in fact, their piety is nothing more than a care to avoid those grievous transgressions which will injure their reputation and destroy their peace of mind; and their pretended regularity is nothing better than indolence, the offspring of self-love.

I know likewise that the most virtuous Christians are not unfrequently deprived of that holy unction and delight which smooth the paths of holiness. But there are three essential points in which the just man who enjoys not the consolations of piety, differs from the tepid and worldly Christian who is oppressed by the yoke, and who experiences no delight in the service of God.

First, the pious Christian in the midst of his spiritual dryness, is comforted by the testimony of a good conscience, and would not exchange that inward and pleasing satisfaction for all the delights which the world could give. The tepid Christian, on the contrary, who experiences no sensible consolations in piety, considers the world as the most plentiful source of enjoyment; fixes his affections on it, and he vainly supposes that this alone will be able to compensate him for the trouble and uneasiness which he incessantly undergoes in the performance of his religious duties.

Secondly, the pious Christian is encouraged and upheld in

his afflictions, by the tranquillity of mind which he enjoys, and which assures him that all is well between him and God. The tepid Christian, on the contrary, carries within him a conscience lacerated and wounded by the many failings which he continues to indulge; and it too generally happens that, experiencing no delight in virtue, he at length seeks his consolation in the ways of sin.

Thirdly, the desolation and spiritual aridity of the just man is a trial sent by God for the exercise of his patience: that of the tepid Christian is a punishment from the same hand. The one experiences in God the love of the most tender father, and instead of sensible consolations, receives from his hands a more abundant supply of grace, and is favoured with a more powerful protection in the hour of temptation; the other experiences in God the severity of a judge, and he is punished for his tepidity, not only by the subtraction of sensible delights, but by the terrors of a guilty conscience, and the dread of incurring that sentence of condemnation which will be hereafter pronounced upon the impenitent.

These, my beloved, are the inevitable consequences of tepidity. Let it not, therefore, be said that it is imprudent to embrace an austere rule of life—that intemperate zeal is of short continuance—or that it is better to proceed by degrees than to expose ourselves to the danger of expending our strength by advancing too hastily in the beginning.

I acknowledge that the Spirit of God is a spirit of discretion and wisdom, and that he does not encourage extremes, not even in piety. But I am authorized by the gospel to declare that you must dedicate yourselves to him without reserve; I am authorized to declare that, in order to be faithful in the more essential duties, you must incessantly labour to subdue every passion; and that if you favour any one of them, let your motive be prudence or what it may, you are digging a pit for your own ruin. Those fervent Christians alone who not only avoid sin, but even the occasions of sin, proceed on in the paths of virtue with an uniform and steady step, and persevere faithfully to the end; and those tepid Christians only who prescribe limits to their piety, and who mingle the pleasures of the world and of religion together, relapse into their former ways, and dishonour piety by the inconstancy of their lives.

It is not, therefore, by dedicating ourselves to God wholly and entirely that a distaste for piety is acquired, but by serving him with negligence. Complete victory is to be obtained, not by sparing the enemy, but by pursuing him

with vigour and dispatch. A surprise is to be avoided, not by sleeping in indolence and sloth, but by a regular attention to every part of our conduct. To be afraid of undertaking too much lest we should not be able to continue on with it, is a vain apprehension. The only method of insuring the grace of perseverance is to begin in such a manner as to leave nothing to be done hereafter. What an illusion is it, my beloved, to avoid zeal as if it were the bane of perseverance, when it is zeal alone that can insure it; to adopt an easy and tepid mode of life, as if it were the only sure way of preventing a relapse, when it is this mode of life that leads most inevitably to it, and to neglect the less important duties of religion, as if they were prejudicial to piety, when piety without these observances is exposed to the most imminent danger.

Knowing therefore, my beloved, the extreme hazard to which the soul is exposed in a state of tepidity; knowing the disastrous consequences which will inevitably result from it; knowing that it will remove from us the special graces of Heaven, and that it will reduce us to a state of weakness and apathy, in which the first breath of temptation that comes will be too strong for any resistance that we may have it in our power to make; let us seriously consider how much it behoves us to be constantly on our guard against the slightest encroachment of so powerful and dangerous an enemy. Be you therefore steadfast in the way of truth, and be not led astray by the dictates of worldly prudence. The love of God must inflame the whole soul. Your salvation is exposed to greater danger in the state of tepidity than in any other. Be convinced that it is your duty to love and serve God as perfectly as you can, and then his grace will assist and protect you in the midst of temptations, and convey you safe through the dangerous ocean of the world to that happy port which we all desire to enter.

XLV.—SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON MAKING LIGHT OF VENIAL SINS.

"For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."—*Rom.*, vi, 10.

This, my beloved, is the glorious example which is held forth for our imitation by the apostle in the epistle of this Sunday. Our Lord died once only to sin: he then cast off the appendages of mortality, forsook the regions of death, and returned

to a life of perfect holiness and justice; "he liveth only to God." Here is our model. Our death to sin must be perfect and permanent; sin must no more have dominion over us; our defiled garments must be washed from every stain; and we must now live to God alone.

This is a maxim which calls particularly for your attentive consideration. Every Christian, indeed, will acknowledge that, after having made his reconciliation with God by sincere repentance, it is his duty to watch over the motions of his soul, and to fall no more into the abyss of mortal sin. But this is not the whole extent of our duty: we must live to God; we must enter into the paths of perfect holiness and justice; we must labour to subdue even the most trivial failings, and we must be resolved to avoid, as far as human weakness will permit, the least venial sin.

This is our duty: fidelity to this is an essential point of Christian piety. This it was that exalted the saints to the pinnacle of perfection, and merited for them the crown of immortality; and this it is that is to obtain for us the grace of perseverance, and to lead us to Heaven. To many this doctrine will appear severe and discouraging. The generality of Christians fear nothing but mortal sin; as if, because this is the only evil that can condemn them to everlasting punishment, this were the only obstacle to salvation; as if no danger was to be apprehended from any of the intermediate steps which lead to ruin. But I will prove in this discourse, that no sin ought to appear light and trivial in the eyes of the true Christian, and that indifference to venial sins leads to the worst consequences.

1. Were we duly impressed with the sublime ideas of the awful majesty of God which faith unfolds to our view, it would not be necessary to enter into a justification of his holy law, or to attempt to prove that no offence committed against him can be properly called trivial and insignificant. The sanctity and the excellence of his divine nature, when contrasted with the abyss of our nothingness, is so infinite, that the malice contained in the smallest sin is far beyond the powers of human comprehension. This may be collected from the severe judgments with which he visited the venial transgressions of his chosen people in former times. A few sticks collected on the day of rest for purposes of necessity, was deemed a violation of the Sabbath, and a crime worthy of death. A trifling jealousy, a slight murmur, drew down the severe affliction of leprosy on the sister of the great lawgiver of Israel. A simple act of diffidence in the promises of God, under a very peculiar embarrassment, was the crime for which

Moses himself was excluded from the land of promise ; and the only mitigation of the sentence, which his known excellence and his familiar intercourse with God were able to procure him, was the favour of beholding it at a distance before his death. In a word, the retaining of a very small portion of the spoils of Jericho for private use, contrary to the express command of God, was the reason why the whole army of Israel was delivered up to the swords of its enemies, and the unhappy Achan was judged guilty of a crime which could be expiated only by his blood.

Could we, my beloved friends, by these or any other considerations, be brought to think soberly : could we be made fully sensible of the majesty of God, how should we shudder at the thought of any offence committed against him, even of such as are set down as light and trivial! Were the full penalty which is annexed even to the slightest of these offences, clearly presented to our view, how should we tremble for ourselves, how gladly should we embrace every opportunity of commuting it, even at the expense of every thing that is most dear, by the voluntary surrender of all that we here most cherish and admire !

Still I admit there is a great distinction to be made betwen the comparative guilt of venial and mortal sin. Indeed there can be no proportion between them ; or it is that proportion only which is found between a temporary suspension of health and the utter extinction of our mortal existence. The one enfeebles the soul, the other destroys it. The one contristates the Holy Spirit that is still within us ; the other leaves nothing in the soul but what excites in the mind of the Deity a just sentiment of hatred and abhorrence. Yet, notwithstanding there is this difference betwcen them, still it must be said that the slightest act of infidelity is an insult offered to God, a formal preference given to the creature before the Creator. And can an insult of this description, offered to a God so great, so holy, so worthy of our homage, be considered as nothing ; especially if we consider that it is not in the power of human nature to atone for it, and that its guilt would never have been removed, had not the Son of God himself offered up the sacrifice of his own blood for its expiation ?

But I will not enlarge on the enormity of venial sin considered as it is in itself : I will pass on to other reflections. I shall consider the dispositions of him who is habitually guilty of venial offences, and I will prove that these dispositions are injurious to the honour of God, and prejudicial to salvation.

First, the man who is solicitous only to avoid mortal sin, and indulges without scruple in the daily commission of lesser

faults, acts in direct opposition to a positive command of God, Be ye perfect, says our Lord, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. This is a formal precept. The degree of perfection, indeed, to which we are to attain, is not specified; but it obliges all to aim at perfection, and to labour to become perfect; as there is nothing which proves a greater obstacle to our advancement towards perfection than a constant habit of venial offences, it imposes the obligation of avoiding them with care and diligence. The man, therefore, who falls into venial sin without scruple, and without any intention of amendment, is guilty of a positive infraction of this precept, and exposes his salvation to great and imminent danger.

Secondly, the reason why so little account is made of venial sin is because it is not deserving of eternal punishment. Now, what is to be deduced from this? That the man who is actuated by this reason is no better than a slave and an hireling; that he is awed into obedience only by the fear of punishment; that he is ready and willing to transgress the law of God in all its more weighty points, as well as in those that are of less importance, were he not deterred by the fear of everlasting punishment; that his fidelity hitherto has been excited, not by the love of justice, or by the desire of promoting the glory of God, but by self-love, and by the dread of the scourge which was held over him. On occasions when the glory of the Lord is the only thing that is essentially concerned, you will generally find that such a person as this will not be very fearful of offending his Maker. On the contrary, he will attempt to justify his conduct, by alleging that he has not forfeited the friendship of God, nor destroyed the life of his soul. In the discernment of good and evil, he consulted only his own honour and advantage; his fidelity was regulated by his own interest.

Is this, my beloved, the disposition of a soul that truly loves God?—or rather, is not such a disposition highly criminal, and injurious to the honour of the Supreme Being? True charity seeketh not its own in this manner. No, my beloved; we act not thus even in human friendships. The man who entertains a sincere affection for another does not consider how far he may insult him without forfeiting his esteem; he avoids every species of affront; he behaves with due civility and decorum at all times; and if on any occasion an unintentional offence be given, he is eager to enter into an explanation, and exculpate himself. Thus it is in human friendships; and is God to be treated with less ceremony than one of our fellow-creatures? Is it a crime of no consequence to consult how far we may offend *him* without for-

feiting his friendship? We cannot say it. And yet we inquire whether it be a mortal or venial sin to defame the character of our neighbour, to excuse ourselves by an untruth, to be over-solicitous about our temporal welfare, to be impatient under trials and afflictions? We do not ask whether these things are displeasing to God, for we are already assured of this; but whether they are mortal sins—whether they are crimes that deserve eternal torments? This is the only object of our solicitude; this alone influences our conduct.

Oh! we must be convinced that these inquiries do not proceed from the love of God, but from the love of ourselves; we must be convinced that we do not hate sin on account of the chief reason why it should be hated, namely, its opposition to the sanctity of the Supreme Being, and that we do not serve God with sincerity and truth. If these, therefore, be our dispositions, our piety is nothing more than the fear of punishment: we are faithful in great things, because we are awed into respect by the severe threats which are denounced in the gospel against the unhappy prevaricators: we are like the unfaithful servant, we hide our talent because we dread the severity of our Master; and were it not for this dread, we should squander it away in trifles and vain amusements: in the dispositions of our hearts—the only dispositions which the Lord considers—who will tell us that we are not children of death, and avowed transgressors of the law?

Thirdly, the deliberate contempt of small faults, even without referring to the dispositions with which we may be animated, exposes us to the most imminent danger of stepping beyond the fatal limits, and falling into the deep abyss of mortal sin. Who can assure us that those continual endeavours to please ourselves, that this eagerness to flatter our senses, and to avoid every constraint, though at the expense of some or other of our lesser duties, are not something more than venial sins? Who can assure us that self-love does not on those occasions so far predominate as to exercise perfect dominion over our souls, to the exclusion of divine charity? Who can say that, on those occasions, when the demon of impurity holds before our unguarded imagination his delusive phantoms, we do not take too much complacency in them, or that our resistance is sufficiently speedy and vigorous? Who can decide positively that those antipathies and dislikes which we entertain without scruple do not amount to the guilt of hatred? Who knows whether that sensibility, that impatience under the pains, or losses, or contradictions which we feel, is not indulged to such a length as to incur the guilt of a

criminal opposition to the orders of Providence? Who can determine whether that anxious solicitude to improve our fortune, that love of dress, and those endeavours to heighten the beauty of our persons, are not pursued with such ardour as to involve us in the crime of ambition, of avarice, or of wanton vanity?—or whether that nice attention to the delicacies of the table, and that assiduity in flattering the sensual appetite, is not accompanied with such pleasure beyond the bounds of necessity as to lead us into the sin of intemperance?

Great God! how is it possible for man to trace the increase or the insensible diminution of thy grace in the soul? Who has ever discovered the fatal boundaries of life and death? Who can weigh the guilt of sin, and determine which is mortal and which is venial? A little less or a little more complacency; a consent of the heart more deliberate or more unguarded; an act of the will more or less complete; an omission in which there is more or less contempt; a thought consented to with deliberation not sufficient to cause the guilt of mortal sin, or a little beyond the limits; ah! who can determine these points! It is not human wisdom that can do it. They are secrets which ought to strike us with terror; they are secrets which will not be disclosed until the great day of vengeance arrives. And yet we live on unconcerned, in a state in which, perhaps, every sin that we consider as venial is a mortal crime in the eyes of God!

The greatest saints, whose consciences did not convict them of sin; who chastised their bodies, and reduced them into subjection; who maintained a constant watchfulness over themselves, and were careful to resist the first motions of temptation; who abstained even from lawful pleasures, when they apprehended that scandal would be given to their neighbour by indulging in them; who worked out their salvation with continual fear and trembling; these men, I say, were terrified at the idea of the uncertainty I am alluding to, and declared that they knew not whether they were worthy of love or hatred. Is it possible, then, that the man who is solicitous only to avoid what are evidently mortal sins; who is unfaithful in lesser things without scruple; who is in imminent danger every instant of stepping beyond the mark; who cannot determine whether in any of these sins he has actually stepped beyond it or not; is it possible that he should flatter himself with the idea that he possesses the precious gift of charity, that he is the friend of God, and that he is entitled to an eternal reward? Suffer not yourselves to be deluded; examine the reasonableness of your hopes, and be your own judge.

Fourthly, although it must be acknowledged that all sins are not mortal, and that some are properly said only to contristate the Holy Spirit, while others are known to banish him entirely from the soul; yet the rules by which they are to be distinguished from each other can neither be positive nor general in their application to particular cases. The enormity and the malice of sin can only be determined by the dispositions of the heart: the same sin is sometimes venial and sometimes mortal: venial, when it does not proceed from any deliberate malice, as indeed it seldom does in minds that are turned to piety; mortal, when committed by the sinner through the corruption and depravity of his heart. Josue and Saul were both guilty of disobedience to the commands of God: the one spared the Gabaonites, the other, the Amalecites: but as Josue sinned only through surprise, his offence was venial; whereas Saul was actuated by pride and obstinacy; he rebelled against the command of God, and therefore his sin was so enormous in the sight of God as to draw down upon him the sentence of reprobation.

Now, my beloved, if this truth be incontestable, what reason have you to suppose that your infidelities are only venial sins? Are you acquainted with the corruption of your own heart to its full extent? The Lord alone, who is its searcher and its judge, is fully acquainted with it; and his eyes are very different from those of men. But if it be allowable to form a judgment beforehand, tell me, whether that fund of habitual indolence and tepidity—that voluntary perseverance in a state which is displeasing to God—that deliberate contempt of duties, merely because they are not considered as essential—that resolution of doing nothing more for God than what is merely requisite to avoid his severest judgments—tell me whether this can be considered in his sight as the proper state of a Christian; and whether the faults proceeding from such a corrupted source can with justice be called trivial and deserving of indulgence? My God! what secrets wilt thou disclose when thou comest to judge justice, and to expose the interior recesses of our hearts!

Fifthly, true charity cannot reside in the soul without manifesting itself exteriorly. It has been likened to a tree growing within us, the roots of which lie concealed in our hearts, while its branches are visible to all, and its goodness can only be known by its fruits. Now the first characteristic of this charity is a propensity to exaggerate every fault, and to attach a degree of criminality even to those actions, which, in the sight of God, are the mere effects of human weakness.

The saints were animated by it; they treated themselves as sinners unworthy of the mercies of the Lord, and placed themselves, in their own estimation, below the last of their fellow-creatures; and can the same divine charity, with which you suppose that you are animated even in the midst of your tepidity and languor, prompt you to think so very differently of your failings, and diminish their enormity in your eyes? No, my beloved, charity is not so inconsistent with itself.

The second characteristic of divine charity is humility, joined with diffidence and timidity. It causes the soul to work out her salvation with fear and trembling; it causes her to endure a martyrdom of love through the anxiety and dread which are continually upon her from the uncertainty of the state in which she now is in the sight of God. This has always been the charity of the saints.

Now, the charity on which you rely when you make little account of venial sins, is tranquil, indolent, and presumptuous; it excludes almost every symptom of fear from your hearts; it places you in a state of unsuspecting security and peace; it induces you to believe that you are rich, and stand in need of nothing. But, my beloved, can the same charity produce such opposite effects? No, to a certainty it cannot: either your charity or the charity of the saints must be counterfeit. Which of the two is most deserving of such a censure must be left to your own judgment to determine.

Lastly, charity is always in motion; it cannot remain idle in the soul; it is a heavenly fire which is never altogether inactive. It may not always indeed burn with so bright a flame, and may possibly appear to be for a time overpowered by involuntary feelings; but these will not extinguish it: in time it will be sure to burst forth again; prayer and the sacraments will restore it to its former vigour, and pious reading and meditation will not fail to rekindle its ardour, and fan it into as bright a flame as ever. It is written in the second book of Maccabees, that the sacred fire which had been buried by the Jews in the earth during their captivity was found at their return covered over with a thick moss, and seemingly extinct; but that it was no sooner exposed to the rays of the sun than it burst into a flame, to the great astonishment of the whole multitude of the Israelites who were present. The same effect is witnessed after the temporary lukewarmness of the just man. When the sacred fire of charity is abated in his breast, and seems to be extinguished by the failings into which he has been seduced by human weakness, it is immediately rekindled and excited into a flame when he approaches to the sacred banquet, when he hears the truths of salvation,

and when Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice, darts on him the rays of his heavenly grace. Then it is that his heart is inflamed, that his fervour is renewed, and that his whole soul is impatient to give testimony of her love, by a more scrupulous attention to every duty.

Thus it is with the just man when he feels a temporary diminution of his primitive fervour. But, my beloved, is it the same with you—you, I mean who make no account of venial sin? May it not be said with truth, that your zeal—that your fervour is never excited into a flame—that the sacraments which you frequent cause no diminution of your tepidity—that the seed of God's word falls upon your souls as upon a barren rock, and produces no other fruit than a few transient desires, without any effective resolutions of amendment—that you are the same to-day as you were yesterday—and that you neither attempt nor desire to advance in perfection beyond your present state? Oh! if this may be said of you, I am afraid that the fire of charity is extinguished in your souls, and that you are dead in the sight of God. It is not my wish nor my intention to destroy your peace of mind; but I am obliged to declare that no dependence is to be placed on such a state; and that, judging by every rule of faith, there is reason to believe that you are more worthy of hatred than of love.

Be, therefore, on your guard; suffer not yourselves to be lulled into a false security by the idea that your transgressions are only venial, because it is not in your power to form a just decision on this subject. Whatever your failings may be, you must lament them, and endeavour to correct them. If you do this, although human nature will never be exempt from imperfections, your charity will be inflamed; you will advance in the paths of perfection; and, in the end, you will be acceptable in the eyes of the great Lord and Master of your souls.

XLVI.—SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DEATH OF THE SINNER.

"For the wages of sin are death: but the grace of God everlasting life."—*Rom.*, vi, 23.

THERE is always some point of view or other in which the human passions appear astonishing and incomprehensible. All men desire to live; and all men dread the idea of death, as the greatest of misfortunes: they are all solicitous to

extend the limits of life, and they all seem to live as if their only desire was to hasten the close of their existence.

It is the same in spiritual things as in temporal. They all flatter themselves that they shall die the death of the just. They look upon the death of the obstinate and unrepenting sinner as a calamity by far the most dreadful that can possibly happen to them; and yet, with all the coolness and unconcern imaginable, they go on cheerfully in a way in which it is, morally speaking, impossible to escape it. That terrible conclusion of life—final impenitence—fills them with dismay; and yet they run on with feasting and merriment in a path which they are fully apprised will certainly lead them to it. It is in vain that we declare, that as a man lives so will he die: they will neither renounce the ways of sin, nor relinquish the expectation of a happy death.

It is my intention on this day, not to display before your eyes the folly and danger of this fatal illusion, for this I shall make the subject of a future discourse; but, since the death of the just appears so desirable, and the death of the sinner so terrible, I will describe them both, and endeavour to awaken your fears and desires by the terrors of the one and the consolations of the other. In both there will be ample matter for your consideration. In the portrait of the dying sinner you will behold the awful close of a life of vanity and pleasure; and in that of the dying saint, the serene and placid tranquillity which is diffused over the mind by virtue and piety. The description of the one will inspire you with a holy eagerness to live the life of the just; and the description of the other will instil into your hearts a horror of sin, and a sincere detestation of the ways of iniquity. Be attentive; for either the one or the other will be your lot.

As the subject is too copious for one discourse, I will describe the death of the sinner on this day, and reserve the other for the following Sunday.

1. I have already remarked to you, that you will either die the death of the sinner or the death of the just. There is no other alternative. Were you blessed with all this world can afford—were the term of your mortal existence extended beyond the utmost limits of your wishes, nevertheless, the day will come when you will be summoned into eternity; and then you will either die in your sins, or you will sleep happily in the Lord. In order that you may be induced to avert by works of penance this most dreadful of all evils, come with me to the bed-side of the dying sinner, and let us contemplate together the anguish and despair which overwhelm his soul at the awful moment of dissolution.

Behold him stretched on the bed of death. The world to him is no more: its vanities, its pleasures, its hopes, its expectations, make no impression on his mind: he has done with them: his thoughts are now otherwise engaged: he is contemplating the tenour of his past life: he is reflecting on his present unhappy state, and looking forward to the state which awaits him hereafter. Let us follow him in the course of his reflections, and endeavour to profit by his experience.

He looks back upon his past life; but what consolation does it afford? It now appears to have been nothing but a dream: he seems to be as it were awakened from sleep, and finds nothing in his hands. He looks around him in vain to discover the fruits of his past labours: he perceives that the world, whose smiles he had courted with such earnestness, is flying from him: that the riches which he had acquired with such difficulty, and on which his affections were so ardently fixed, are now slipping out of his hands; that his reputation and name, on which he had prided himself, will not attend him to the tribunal of God, but will only serve to decorate his tomb.

Ah! with what anguish does he reflect, that he has laboured all his life-time, and done nothing for himself; that he has endured mortifications without number, and advanced not a step towards Heaven! He foolishly supposed that the service of God was above his strength, and at the same time he displayed the courage of a martyr in the pursuit of a world which he is now obliged to quit. How does he lament his blindness and folly! With what surprise does he view the immense void which appears in his life! With what despair does he reflect that he has not even yet begun to live for God; and that, out of so many actions, so many labours, there is not one that deserves to be recorded in the great book of eternity! Oh! listen to his exclamations. "What!" he cries with faltering voice, "what! have I hitherto lived only for vanity! Could I have done as much for God as I have done for the world! Was it fitting that I should have taken such pains, and struggled as I have done, with so much trouble and vexation, only to lose my soul! I have suffered more to gain Hell, than would have been required to gain Heaven. I supposed that the life of the just man was wretched and insupportable; and lo! mine was infinitely more wretched and entitled to no reward."

Yes, my beloved; at that awful moment we shall view things in a very different light from what we now do. The illusion will then be removed: the clouds will be dispersed, and we shall clearly see that works of piety and religion are

by far more estimable than the most brilliant exploits which the world holds up to the admiration of its deluded followers.

In addition to the anguish which arises from the vanity of his past labours, he is agitated by the recollection of his former pleasures—pleasures which lasted only for a moment, and for which he sacrificed his God and his all. Alas! he thought the term of his life too long to be devoted to the service of his God: the series of years which he supposed he had to live, appeared like an immense plain, over the whole of which he deliberately resolved not to carry his cross. He imagined that if he returned to God in the last stage of life, there could be no doubt of his finding a ready asylum in his bounty. He now sees with astonishment that the longest life is no more than an instant; that it is only one step as it were from the mother's womb to the grave; and that, to devote any part of that short space to empty pleasures, is the height of folly.

This reflection is accompanied with the excruciating remembrance of his crimes, the guilt of which will adhere to him for ever. During the time of health he never took a serious review of his conscience: how matters stood between him and God was a subject that never occupied his attention. But now the dark abyss is enlightened. The weakness of youth, the licentiousness of manhood, the passions of more advanced age, all stare him in the face. Heaven and earth, says Job, conspire against him, and present before his distracted imagination the dreadful catalogue of his irregularities and crimes.

These are the tortures which the sinner endures from the recollection of the past: what is present to him is not more consoling.

2. He had always flattered himself that the day of the Lord would not come upon him suddenly. But, behold! he is stretched upon the bed of death, charged with the enormous load of his sins; he is charged to appear before the tribunal of God, and he has not begun his preparation.

What a surprise! He is at the point of death, and all is yet to be done which he had purposed to do in the time of health. He endeavours to flatter himself with the hope that death is not so near, and to soothe his mind with the vain determination of making his peace with God as soon as his disorder begins to abate. These hopes cause him to neglect even the last opportunity, and he is the victim of delusion even to the last moment. Yes, my God! the scriptures must be fulfilled. Thou hast said, that the sinner should be surprised in his sins, and thy word will not fall away.

At length the moment arrives, and he can hope no longer. Now comes the final separation from every thing that was dear. The more closely he was attached to this world, to life, and to creatures, the more does he feel the smart.

He must bid adieu to his riches and property. They already begin to slip out of his hands. The heap melts before his eyes. He retains nothing but the fond love of them, the unwillingness to part with them, and the crimes which he committed in acquiring them.

He must bid adieu to his beloved body, for whose gratification he has sacrificed his God and his all. He must bid adieu to his dear relatives—his wife—his children—his friends, whose lamentations harrow up his very soul. He must bid adieu to the world, which had been so much the object of his love. In a word, he must bid adieu to all creatures. Every thing seems to vanish from his sight. He stretches out his hands to the objects around him, as if to implore their assistance; but in vain: they disappear like smoke.

Now it is that God appears great and mighty to the dying sinner. At this awful moment, when all creation is vanishing from his sight, that great Being alone—the self-existent, the eternal Lord—who fills all things, and with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration, presents himself before him. In the day of his strength, he had frequently asked, in a strain of irony and impiety, how it was possible to entertain an ardent love for God, whom he could not see, and not love creatures whom he saw, and whom he was so strongly induced to love by nature itself? But now he will behold only God. That which was invisible will be the only visible object. All other things will disappear, and God alone will take the place of those airy phantoms which had deluded him during life.

3. My God! what an universal change is this! He turns his eyes on every side to find some small subject of consolation; but in vain: the frightful horrors of death have encompassed him. He attempts to look forward to the state that awaits him; but here a more terrible spectacle presents itself before him. He would willingly turn away his eyes again; but he cannot. He is forced to behold it, and the sight fills him with horror and dismay. A futurity, a region of darkness into which he is about to enter, accompanied only by his works—an unknown land, from which no one has ever returned—an immense abyss, in the contemplation of which he is lost and confounded—the grave, that gloomy mansion of horror, where he will shortly take his place amongst the bones and ashes of his forefathers—an incomprehensible eternity, the first glimpse

of which strikes him with affright—in a word, the terrible tribunal before which he is about to appear and give an account of his life, every stage of which has been defiled with crimes and abominations.

Ah! when he saw futurity only at a distance he did not fear it; but now that he is struck by the hand of God—now that he perceives the approach of death—now that he beholds the gates of eternity thrown open to receive him, and is convinced that the moment is arrived when he must step into that futurity which he so totally disregarded: oh! he is appalled; he either falls into a state of the most abject fear, indulging his lamentations, and raising up his suppliant hands to Heaven; or he becomes melancholy, silent, agitated, revolving in his mind the most dreadful reflections, concluding that the mercies of God are withdrawing from him for ever, and that prayers and tears will avail him as little as fury and despair.

Yes, my beloved; this unhappy wretch, who indulged his passions without restraint, who had flattered himself with the idea that a few moments reflection—that one act of compunction at the hour of death, would be sufficient to appease the wrath of God, now despairs of his mercy. In vain does the minister of the Lord, who is summoned to attend him, describe the infinite treasures of mercies which are in store for repenting sinners: he knows that he has rendered himself unworthy of them. In vain does he attempt to allay his fears by exposing before his eyes the bosom of divine clemency: his words do not affect him: he admires the charity of the Church, which never despairs of the salvation of her children; but he knows that the degrees of God's justice are irrevocable and eternal. In vain does he invoke him to put his trust in God, and to hope for the pardon of his sins; a secret but terrific voice in the interior of his soul, declares that there is no salvation for the impious, and that no dependence can be placed on the hopes that are held out to him. In vain does he encourage him to have recourse to the last remedies which religion prescribes to the dying: he has no more confidence in them than he has in those desperate remedies which are hazarded when all other hopes are lost, and which are administered more for the satisfaction of surviving friends, than for any benefit which is likely to accrue to him. He puts into his mouth the words of scripture—the sentiments of the penitent David: but his heart disclaims those inspired expressions; he knows that prayer composed by a mind glowing with the most ardent love and compunction, are not fit for a sinner like him, who is surprised in his sins. The

minister of the Lord holds before him the image of his crucified Jesus; but the sight, so calculated to inspire confidence and impart consolation, silently upbraids him with ingratitude, and reproves him for the abuse of the inspirations and graces which it had procured for him.

The moment, however, of dissolution approaches; no time is to be lost; the attendants prostrate themselves by his bedside, and the minister of God with a loud voice commences the last prayer, *or recommendation of the departing soul: Go forth, Christian soul*, he says. He does not address him by any pompous title according to the world. No; at this last moment he lays all other titles aside, and addresses him by that only which he received in baptism—the only title which he held in no estimation—and the only title which will remain with him for ever. *Go forth, Christian soul:* alas! he has lived as if the body were the whole of his being; he has even attempted to persuade himself that the soul was nothing, and that all would be annihilated with the body: and now he is informed that it is his body that is nothing but dust, which must speedily be dissolved; and that the immortal part of his existence is this soul—this image of the Divinity—this intelligence endowed with a capacity of knowing and loving him which is on the point of being separated from her earthly dwelling, and appearing before her Judge. *Go forth, Christian soul:* the earth on which thou hast lived was only the place of thy banishment; thy life was a state of probation, a short pilgrimage; but thou hast made it thy resting-place, the abode of sensual pleasure and vanity: the Church expected that the tidings of the approaching dissolution of thy earthly habitation would have been to thee tidings of joy and gladness; she supposed that thou wouldst have lifted up thy head and exulted, because the end of thy exile, the conclusion of thy miseries was at hand; but, alas! she announces to thee tidings the most dismal, the most alarming; she announces to thee the near approach of everything that is terrible—the beginning of pains and sorrows. *Go forth, Christian soul*, stamped with the seal of salvation which thou hast effaced; redeemed by the blood of Jesus which thou hast trodden under foot; washed with the laver of regeneration which thou hast defiled; enlightened by the light of faith which thou hast disregarded; favoured with the choicest blessings of Heaven, which thou hast impiously profaned. *Go forth, Christian soul:* go, present thyself before the tribunal of Jesus with this august title, which ought to have been the pledge of thy salvation, but which thou hast made the greatest of thy crimes. *Go forth, Christian soul.*

O my beloved friends, what a situation is this! In the retrospective view of his past life he discovers motives only for regret; in the view of the present, objects only of affliction and grief; and in the contemplation of the future, horrors which appal him. Oh, what a bitter draught! But will it not admit of one single drop of consolation? No; every source is dried up; the world is vanishing from his sight: man cannot free him from death, and God, into whose hands he is about to fall, is his declared enemy, from whom he can expect no mercy. He is agitated by the dismal terrors that surround him on every side: he renews his vain efforts to escape from death, or at least to escape from himself; his melancholy groans render his half-broken sentences unintelligible; and it is impossible to ascertain whether they proceed from repentance or from despair. His dying eyes appear gloomy and wild; he casts a frightful glance on the image of his crucified God; and his attendants are uncertain whether it is occasioned by hope or fear, by hatred or love. He becomes convulsed, but whether on account of the dissolution of the body or the terrors of the soul which begins to feel the approach of her Judge, no one can ascertain. He sends forth bitter groans; but it is doubtful whether they are caused by the sorrowful remembrance of his past crimes or by the dread of death. At length, in the midst of these violent agitations, his eyes become fixed—his features change—his countenance is distorted—his livid mouth expands—his body trembles, and by this last effort his unhappy soul separates herself with seeming regret from this house of clay, falls into the hands of God, and in an instant is standing unprotected and alone before the terrible tribunal of his justice.

Thus, my brethren, do they die who forget God during the days of their health; and thus will you die, if you are surprised in your sins. Everything will change around you, but you yourselves will not change. It is certain that you will die, and, if sinners, that you will die as you live. God himself has declared it. Prevent, therefore, this greatest of all misfortunes by timely repentance. Live the life of the just, and then your death, like unto theirs, will be accompanied with joy, with peace, and consolation.

XLVII.—EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DEATH OF THE JUST.

"If you live according to the flesh you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live."—*Rom.*, viii, 13.

This, my beloved, friends, is a sentence which is not attended to by the admirers of the world until the fatal moment arrives when it is to be accomplished in their own persons. They live thoughtless and gay, according to the flesh; they run on from one false pleasure to another, from one scene of dissipation to another, from one crime to another, they still flatter themselves with the hopes of eternal life in the end; but the sentence is passed; the thief comes upon them in the night when they least expect it; and they die in their sins. But I have already sufficiently warned you on that subject; I will therefore turn to one that is more pleasing, and by exhibiting before your eyes the just man in the last scene of his mortal existence, I will endeavour to inspire you with the love of virtue, and excite you to form such resolutions so to mortify by the spirit the deeds of the flesh, as to be entitled, like him, to live in everlasting glory.

The approach of death, I acknowledge, is sufficient to strike terror into the most exemplary, the most pious among men. So inscrutable are the judgments of God, and impenetrable are the secrets of futurity that it is not in the power of man to look forward to them with a fixed and tranquil eye. But the terrors which are felt by sinners are very different from those which are experienced by the just man. The one is tortured by despair; the other is encouraged by the sweetest hope and confidence: the one is agitated by the recollection of the past, by the view of the present, and by the prospect of the future; the other receives the greatest consolation from those very sources. You have already beheld the one, and you were terrified; come and behold the other, and you will be edified and comforted.

1. Imagine to yourselves that you behold the just man on the bed of death, with his eyes fixed on Heaven, and the most lively sentiments of joy and hope painted on his countenance. He is not taken by surprise; the thief does not come upon him suddenly. He had long foreseen, and had prepared himself for this event; he had laid up a store of good works that he might not appear before his Judge entirely

destitute: he had lived by faith that he might die in the peace and consolation of hope. And now his last hour is arrived—that hour which had always hitherto been the subject of his thoughts, and to which he had directed all the self-denials and mortifications, all the crosses and afflictions of his whole life. Oh, with what ecstacies of delight does he look back and contemplate his former penitential labours and sufferings!

The winter is now past; the storms are over; the time of trials and temptations is gone by; his conflicts with the world are at an end; the perils to which his innocence was exposed are vanished; the violence of his passions is subsided; and the obstacles which flesh and blood opposed to his progress in piety are removed for ever. His vessel has now reached the harbour; and from this haven of security and rest he surveys the boisterous ocean through which he has passed; he recals to mind the tempests that threatened him with destruction, the difficulties he surmounted, and the perils he has so happily escaped. Like Moses expiring on the mountain of God, he takes a view from the top of the sacred eminence on which he stands; he surveys the different events of his life—the fatigues of the desert—the rebellions of the flesh—the calumnies of false brethren—the pains of hunger and thirst—the sufferings of mortification and penance—the victories obtained over the world and the devil—the conquest over his passions; and now, happily arrived at the term of his labours, he sings a canticle of thanksgiving and praise; he looks forward to his approaching dissolution as the recompense of his toils, and the completion of his painful pilgrimage; and closes his eyes to the world in the sweetest transports of gratitude and love.

In this retrospective view of the past, I will not say that the faults into which he was led by human frailty will entirely escape his notice: no, it could not be expected. They will all present themselves before him; but the sight will not be terrific; they will appear divested of their guilt, and expiated by the tears of repentance; they will recal to his recollection the mercies of the Lord which came forward to support him in the moment of his infirmity—which raised him from the ground and enabled him to run forward again in the paths of virtue with increased alacrity and speed. Yes; the sorrow excited by the view of his sins at that last hour is a sorrow of consolation and love; the tears which the recollection of them forces from his eyes are tears of gratitude and joy. The mercies with which he has been already favoured assure him that there are more in store for him; the protection which he has hitherto experienced from

above encourages him to look forward to the future with the sweetest confidence. In the days of mourning and repentance, God appeared to him like a severe judge whom he had offended, and whom it was his duty to appease; but now he appears like the Father of Mercies and the God of all consolation, who is about to receive him into his embraces, and put an end to his labours and afflictions for ever.

Listen to the invitations of his Lord: "Lift up thy head, my faithful spouse," does he say; "the day of thy redemption is at hand. Thou hast partaken of my bitter chalice, and hast emptied it cheerfully to the dregs. Break the bonds of thy captivity, O daughter of Sion; leave behind thee the garments of mourning and sorrow, and put on the robes of joy and gladness. Go forth from the midst of Babylon; thou shalt no longer dwell in the midst of the uncircumcised. It is time that I take possession of my own. Thou didst not belong to earth; thou hast lived on it like a stranger. Come, then, my beloved, enter into the joys which I have prepared for thee in the kingdom of Heaven."

2. Oh! what consolation is this which the recollection of the past infuses into the soul of the dying saint. But this is not all; the view of the present contributes in an equal degree to his happiness. The terrors which assail the heart of the dying sinner when he discovers that he is surprised in his sins, and that he is on the point of being separated from all that is dear, are things that are never experienced by the just man.

He is not surprised; he was always in readiness for the coming of his Lord. The day of his deliverance was the object of his sighs. The thoughts of death were familiar to him; they seasoned all his actions; they accompanied all his projects; they regulated all his desires; and they influenced the whole deportment of his life. He was always prepared to give an account of his stewardship; he was always on the watch, with his lamp burning in his hand. When betrayed into sin by human infirmity, he instantly rose again and returned to his loving Father; he dreaded the idea of being separated from him even for one night, because he did not know but that night might be his last. Thus did he live; thus was his whole life a preparation for death; and now that his last hour is arrived, he meets it with tranquillity and joy, in the sweet peace of the Lord, and in the pleasing expectation of the full accomplishment of his promises.

The dying sinner is seized with despair when he perceives that the world—the object of all his hopes and of all his wishes—is about to be taken from him. Not so the just man in the moment of his departure hence; he had always

considered the world as no better than a vapour that passes rapidly away—than a phantom which can only deceive us at a distance. And how rejoiced is he at this his last hour that he had formed this opinion of it, that he had never suffered himself to be deluded by its empty vanities, and that he had resolutely adhered to the service of *Him* from whom alone he could receive an adequate and permanent recompense. Oh! with what rapture does he exclaim: "Truly, my soul, thou hast chosen the better part: with reason hast thou placed thy confidence in God alone. The world ridiculed thy choice; the world accused thee of folly and bigotry, because thou wouldst not conform to its corrupt maxims; but now the truth is manifested; death decides whether I had reason on my side or not; now it is known which is the wise, and which is the foolish man."

This, then, is the point of view in which the just man beholds the world and all its cheating vanities at the point of death. And, therefore, when the minister of the Lord comes to offer words of comfort to his soul, to speak to him of his God, and of the vanity of all human things, he listens to him with delight. His sentiments are neither new nor unknown to him; he is familiarized with them; they are the sentiments of his own heart; they are the same sentiments which influenced his conduct through life. The infinite mercies of God, the good things of eternity, the happiness of Heaven, the emptiness of worldly vanity, are the only subjects that engage his attention; all others are insipid and disgusting; and so absorbed is he in this pleasing contemplation, that it is not without difficulty that his attention is drawn off to the few temporal concerns that may yet remain to be settled. Oh, what peace of mind, what transports, what ecstacies of love, of joy, of confidence does he experience!—how is his faith renewed, his love inflamed, his fervour excited, his compunction revived! Truly may we say: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

To the sinner the language of piety is fatiguing; it adds to his disquietude; it increases his pains; it disturbs his rest; he is not in a condition to bear it; in fact, he can hear nothing. His mind is still haunted with the vanities of the world, the occurrences that have lately happened, the idle sports and amusements of others, the common news of the day, and a thousand other vague and petulant fooleries which he is ready to listen to, and his attendants are as willing to communicate, to keep up his broken spirits, and divert his attention from from the dread and anxiety he would otherwise feel in the dismal prospect of his approaching dissolution.

But to return to the just man. Now is the time when he is to take his last farewell of all earthly things. He prepares for the separation with calm tranquillity, and tears himself from them without violence and without sorrow. The world never possessed his affections; he has lived in it as a stranger, and therefore he quits it without regret. He was not attached to wealth; his treasure was in Heaven; his riches were the consolation of the poor; he has laid up a store where neither moth nor rust can consume, nor thieves break in and steal; and now he goes with joy to take possession of it in the kingdom of God. He takes leave of his relatives and friends without grief; he hopes the separation is only for a time, and that those whom charity has united together on earth will meet again hereafter in the bosom of the Divinity. He leaves his body without regret; this has been long a burden to him; he always considered it a domestic enemy which subjected him to the influence of carnal desires—as a house of clay which detained him in captivity, and prevented his immediate union with the beloved Jesus. He now longs to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

Thus separated in affection from all things below, it cannot be supposed that the changes which begin to take place make any impression on his mind. No; his body dissolves—creatures seem to vanish from his sight—the light disappears—all nature falls as it were into its ancient nothing; but in the midst of all these changes, he alone remains firm and unchangeable.

Oh, how great, how exalted is the true Christian on the bed of death!—the just man struggling in the last stage of his mortal existence is a spectacle worthy of God, of angels, and of men. Then does he come forth the conqueror of the world and of himself: he begins to participate of the greatness and immutability of his Maker: he is lifted up beyond the reach of all earthly things: he is calm and serene in the midst of his excruciating pains: he is free among the dead: he is immoveable in the bosom of the Divinity, whilst every thing is dissolving around him. How truly great, I again repeat, is the man who has lived in the observance of God's law, and who dies in his love? How grand it is to see him advance with a steady and majestic step towards the gates of eternity! Truly, my beloved, the sublimity of religion is displayed in all its lustre at this awful moment. Oh! "may my soul die the death of the just, and may my last end be like unto theirs."—*Numb.*, xiii, 13.

3. It is this prospect into futurity that fills up the measure of consolation and delight which the true Christian enjoys in

his last moments. The sinner takes a distant view of futurity without any extraordinary motions of fear; but no sooner is he summoned upon it than he is seized with terror and dismay. The just man, on the other hand, is afraid to fix his eyes on the inscrutable judgments of God; he works out his salvation in the time of health, with fear and trembling; but on the bed of death—ah! then the God of peace and consolation soothes his troubled mind; his fears and apprehensions vanish, and he looks forward with the sweetest hope. His dying eyes pierce through the dark cloud that encompasses him; like the blessed Stephen, he beholds the heavens opened, and the Son of man sitting at the right hand of his Father, with his arms extended to receive him: he sees his beloved country, after which he has sighed so long—the holy Sion which the God of his forefathers fills with the glory of his presence, where he inebriates the elect with the torrent of his delights, and replenishes their souls with those ineffable pleasures which he has prepared for those who love him. He beholds the city of the people of God—the abode of the saints—the residence of the patriarchs and prophets, where he will again meet his brethren, with whom he was united on earth by the bonds of charity, and in whose society he will eternally bless the mercies of the Lord, and sing aloud his praises for ever.

Ah! when the minister of the Lord announces to this happy soul the joyful tidings that his hour is come, and that eternity is at hand, with what rapture does he hearken to the heavenly summons! "Go forth, Christian soul," he says: quit this earth, on which thou hast lived as a stranger: the time of sorrow and tribulation is past; the chains of thy mortality are broken: return into the bosom of God, from whence thou camest; fly away from a world which was not worthy of thee. "Go forth, Christian soul;" the Lord at length has compassion on thy tears: he is coming to open to thee the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem—the city of the saints: go, unite thyself to the Church in Heaven, which is waiting to receive thee. But, in the midst of thy happiness, do not forget thy brethren whom thou leavest behind, exposed to the storms and tempests of the world; have compassion on the Church on earth, which begot thee in Jesus Christ: solicit the termination of her captivity: pray that the term of her exile may be shortened, and that she may be united to her beloved Spouse for eternity. "Go forth, Christian soul:" they who sleep in the Lord do not perish: we shall be deprived of thy society only for a time; to-morrow we shall be united with thee again in the kingdom of Jesus. Thy body

which thou leavest a prey to worms and corruption will soon follow thee glorious and immortal—more resplendent than the light, more beautiful than the sun: not a hair of thy head will perish. How happy art thou, my beloved brother!—thou wilt henceforward be released from the miseries and afflictions to which we shall remain exposed; thou wilt be no longer in danger of losing thy God; thou wilt shut thy eyes for ever to the scandals and vanities of the world, and open them to behold only the real and substantial good things of eternity. What a happiness it is to be called away from a land in which there is nothing but labour, and sorrow, and disgust, and to be invited to enter the abodes of peace, of serenity, and of gladness, where thy only occupation will be to enjoy the God whom thou lovest! "Go forth, Christian soul."

Oh! what a pleasing summons is this to the dying Christian! with what calmness, gratitude, and confidence does he prepare to obey it! His eyes are fixed on the heavens; his heart throbs with unusual transports of joy; he seems to behold his Jesus coming to receive him; he exclaims with the venerable Simon: "Now, my God, dost thou dismiss thy servant in peace. O burst asunder the enfeebled chains which yet bind me to the earth. My heart is ready, sweet Jesus, my heart is ready. I wait in peace and confidence for the accomplishment of thy promises." Thus purified by the expiations of a holy and Christian life, strengthened by the last sacraments, washed in the blood of the Lamb, comforted by the interior consolations of the Holy Spirit, ripe for eternity, he closes his eyes with joy to all creatures; he sleeps in peace in the Lord; and he returns into the bosom of the Divinity from whence he came.

Beloved Christians, on such an occasion as the present, it is useless to suggest any reflections. Such facts as these need no comment. Such is the death of the good and devout Christian. His death, like his life, is precious in the sight of the Lord. You have witnessed the departure of the sinner who lived in the forgetfulness of his Creator; and you have seen that his death, like his life, was abominable in the sight of God. If you live like the sinner, according to the flesh, you will die; you will be encompassed at your last hour with the same horrors and despair; and the tortures you will then endure will be only a prelude to those eternal torments which are prepared for the impious in the life to come. But if, like the just, you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you will live; your life will be hidden with Christ in God in this world, and will be transcendently glorious in the next.

XLVIII.—NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE INTERIOR DISPOSITIONS THAT OUGHT TO ACCOMPANY US TO THE HOUSE OF GOD.

"It is written, my house is the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves."—*Luke*, xix, 46.

Whence this wrath and indignation in the Lamb of God? Is this consistent with the character of the King of Peace who was to appear in Sion decked only in the robes of meekness and humility? When the woman taken in adultery was presented to him he was all clemency and mildness. When Magdalen, the sinner, cast herself at his feet, he received her into favour and pardoned her iniquities. When the disciples petitioned to be permitted to call down fire from Heaven to consume a city of the Samaritans, he rebuked them, saying, that they knew not of what spirit they were. He even wept, as is recorded in the beginning of the gospel read on this Sunday, at the sight of the evils which were hanging over the criminal Jerusalem on account of her multiplied enormities, although at the same instant she was meditating the completion of her crimes—the death of her Deliverer himself. On all occasions he was compassionate and merciful, and so great was his mildness towards those unhappy wretches who had deviated from the paths of justice, that he was derided by his enemies as the friend of publicans and sinners.

Whence, therefore, this indignation? What was the crime that called it forth? They profaned the holy temple; they dishonoured the house of his Father; they made it a den of thieves. This was their crime; and this it was that, above all other crimes, excited his wrath, and drew down from him, on this memorable occasion, stronger marks of his real anger and indignation than any that he exhibited during the whole course of his mortal life; verifying that illustrious saying of his by the mouth of his prophets: "the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up."

But, my beloved, if the profanation of the Jewish temple was so hateful in the sight of God, how aggravated must be the guilt of profaning the temples of the new law? Our places of worship far surpass in dignity and excellence all other places that have at any time been erected and consecrated to the worship of the living God. On our altars the Lamb

without spot is immolated; by our ministry the same victim is offered up which is adored by all the angels and saints in Heaven: here the glory of the Lord is to be seen: this is truly the house of prayer; and to profane this temple, this house of prayer, is a crime of far greater magnitude than that which was so severely reprobated by our Lord in the gospel of this Sunday. A few reflections on this subject will contribute to heighten your veneration for the house of God, and induce you to enter into those dispositions of purity and innocence which every Christian ought to possess when he presents himself before the Lord in his holy place.

1. The whole universe may with propriety be called the temple of the Most High; for from one extremity to the other it is filled with his glory. He is in every place and in every thing. It is in him that we live, and move, and have our being. Were we to ascend up into Heaven, he would be there; were we to descend into the lowest abyss of hell, he would be there; were we to fly on the wings of the wind even to the uttermost bounds of the earth, it would be his hand that directed us; the most distant regions, where he is neither adored nor known, are filled by his presence, and are as much under his controlling power as the nations where he is most adored and worshipped.

Notwithstanding, however, this immensity of the great Creator, particular places have been consecrated to him in all ages, and he has vouchsafed to honour them with his special presence. Altars were erected by the patriarchs, the tabernacle by Moses, and the first temple by Solomon. Here alone it was that the Jews were allowed to offer sacrifices; and here it was that they assembled at stated times from every part of the world to worship God by prayers and supplications.

From the time that the new law was established the faithful in every age erected temples and altars to the living God, and decorated them with the most costly ornaments. These temples, however, were more dignified, more awful than the tabernacle of Moses or the temple of Solomon. Under the old law everything was done in figure; under the new, all is substantial and real. The Lord then dwelt in the heavens, as the prophet expresses it, and his abode was above the clouds; but now that he has vouchsafed to appear on earth, converse with men, and bequeath to us his sacred body and blood in the mystic sacrifice, he resides personally within our temples; these are the new heavens which he seemed to promise to mankind by the mouth of his prophet (*Isa.*, lxvi); these he has made his abode, and in these he is adored, enjoyed, and possessed by his servants on earth, as he is in Heaven by his

angels. I will not say that he is surrounded by the splendours of his glory in these our temples in the same manner as he is in Heaven; he is concealed under a veil: but, with this only difference excepted, he is here as intimately, as wholly, and as undivided as he is in the great temple of his glory above.

This being the awful dignity of our places of worship, this the nature of the new heavens which the Lord honours with his presence, it is only with the dispositions of purity and innocence that we can with propriety present ourselves before his altars, and pay our homage to him. He is, as I before remarked, in every place, and consequently it is our duty to be at all times pure and without stain; for, deliberately to entertain a criminal affection for sin is, in fact, to profane the earth which is sanctified by his presence. But our temples are specially consecrated to God: these are the chosen places of his abode, and consequently greater purity is required before we presume to enter, lest we defile the sanctity of the Supreme Being who inhabits them.

When the temple of Jerusalem was erected by the command of God, particular attention was paid to this subject. The utmost precaution was taken that no man in a state of defilement and sin should enter within the walls of the sacred edifice. The Holy of Holies, which the Lord had chosen particularly to set apart for himself, and which alone was considered as his real temple upon earth, was situated in the most retired, the most inaccessible part of the temple. In the environs of that majestic structure, at a distance, was erected a spacious court, into which alone the Gentiles and strangers were admitted who applied to be instructed in the law. Nearer to the sacred edifice was erected another spacious court, and into this the sons of Abraham alone were allowed to enter. This was the only house of prayer for the children of the promises, the elect of God; and into this they were not allowed to enter (although far remote from the inner sanctuary, or Holy of Holies) until they had cleansed themselves from every defilement, and had prepared themselves by fasts and ablutions. A third court, more interior, and approaching nearer to the seat of God's interior tabernacle, was appointed for the sacrificers. Into this the priests alone entered; here it was that they offered up the daily victims, and exhibited on the altar the show-bread. If any man but a priest presumed to enter this consecrated place, he was condemned by the law to be stoned to death as a sacrilegious profaner. Even a king of Israel, the rash Orias, presuming on his authority and power, no sooner dared to offer incense than he was instantly struck by the Almighty with the

leprosy, degraded by his subjects from his throne, and condemned to linger out the remainder of his days secluded from all society and commerce with mankind. Last of all, behind all these barriers and separations, was situated the Holy of Holies. This awful, this retired part of the temple, was concealed from inspection by a majestic veil impervious to the eyes, and not to be passed by mortal man, not even by the just, by the prophets, nor by the ministers of the Lord themselves, the high priest alone excepted; and even the high priest was not allowed to enter oftener than once in the year, and then he was prepared by numberless religious rites, by a solemn fast of all Israel: and he entered carrying in his hand the blood of the victim.

And yet, my brethren, what was it that was contained in this awful, this inaccessible place, this Holy of Holies? Nothing more than the tables of the law, the manna, and the rod of Aaron—mere figures and shadows of what was to come. God himself, indeed, sometimes spoke from thence to his people; but he did not reside there after the same manner as he resides in the Christian temples, whose doors are thrown open to all the faithful indiscriminately.

Now, Christian brethren, if the goodness of God, under a law of grace and love, has not fixed such awful barriers betwixt him and us; if he has thrown down the wall of separation, and has given every one free access even to the Holy of Holies where he himself resides, what conclusion are we to draw from it? Can it be that less sanctity is required in those who worship him under the new law? Far from it. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the Christian who is daily obliged to endure, at the foot of the tremendous sanctuary, the awful presence of the God whom he invokes and adores, ought to be pure, and holy, and faithful, in proportion to the familiarity of the intercourse which he is allowed to enjoy with his Creator.

It is for this reason that the apostle Peter distinguishes the Christian people by the several appellations of *an holy nation, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood—an holy nation,* because they enjoy the privilege of presenting themselves daily before the altar of the Lord: *a chosen generation,* because they are consecrated by baptism, and especially appointed to his service and worship: *a royal priesthood,* because they are made in some degree partakers of the priesthood of his Son, the great High Priest of the new law, and because they enjoy the privilege, which formerly belonged only to the high priest, of entering the Holy of Holies, and adoring their Lord on the altar of propitiation.

It is, therefore, on account of the sanctity of our baptism, and of our particular consecration to the service of God, that the sacred doors of the temple are thrown open to us. If we fall from this state of sanctity, we forfeit the privileges attached to it; we lose our right of presenting ourselves before the altar; we are not worthy to mix in the assembly of the faithful.

According to the rules of Christian justice, the temples of God are for the just alone. Everything that is performed therein requires holiness and justice in the beholders: the mysteries which we celebrate are awful and tremendous, and ought not to be seen but with the purest eyes: the victim that we offer is the victim of reconciliation for humble and sincere penitents, or the invigorating bread of life for strong and perfect Christians. The sacred canticles that resound in our temples are the pious effusions of the heart that is turned to repentance, or the warm expressions of devout affection in the bosom of God's faithful servants kindling into ecstacy at the remembrance of his many mercies, and ardently longing for the courts of the Lord.

The Church expresses her veneration for the holy temples in the most solemn manner. She purifies with prayer everything that is appointed for the use of the altar; she consecrates or blesses the very walls of the edifice within which the awful, the tremendous Deity is to be invoked and mystically immolated. She places water, blessed with solemn exorcisms and prayers, near the door of the temple, and exhorts the faithful to sprinkle it on their foreheads as they enter, to remind them of the necessity of purifying their souls from the smallest stains and defilements of sin, lest they profane the sanctity of the God into whose special presence they are about to enter.

Formerly, public penitents were not allowed to be present during the celebration of the holy mysteries. They were separated from their brethren; the porch of the temple was allotted for them, and there they prostrated themselves on the ground, clothed in sackcloth and ashes: they were banished, as it were, from the face of the Lord, and not permitted to enter till a competent time had been spent in the painful exercises of mortification and penance. This humiliating distinction is not made in these times. It would be impossible, on account of the multitude of believers, and the universal dissolution of morals. The Church of God is now constrained to open the doors of her temples to the unjust as well as the just: she now lifts up the veil of the sanctuary even in the presence of the profane; and her ministers are no

longer enjoined to banish from before her altars all who are unclean, at the solemn commencement of these sacred and mysterious rites. But reflect, my brethren, that although the Church is necessitated by circumstances to act in this manner, she nevertheless supposes that, if you have not effected your justification when you appear before the God of majesty, you at least entertain the inclination, and are prepared to make the resolution of entering upon a course of penance: she supposes that, if you are not purified from your sins, you are at least sorry for them, and that your confusion will be the commencement of a new life.

The desire, therefore, of endeavouring to satisfy the justice of God without delay, if you are sinners, is the only thing that can authorize you to appear in this holy place: and if you do not entertain these desires—if you are not come to lament over your transgressions, and to renounce all affection to sin, you are not, indeed, rejected by the Church, because she cannot see the heart, but you are rejected in secret by God; you are an anathema in his sight; you are not entitled to present yourselves either at the altar or the sacrifice; you come to defile by your presence the sanctity of these awful mysteries, to take your seat in a place that is not intended for you, and from which the angel of the Lord invisibly drives you away, as he formerly drove the first sinner from the garden of innocence and holiness, which the Lord sanctified by his presence.

In fact, what can be more insulting to the majesty of God, than for the man who is in open hostility against him, to appear in his presence, without so much as one sentiment of grief or of shame arising in his breast? What can be more irreverent to the sanctity of God, than for the sinner, defiled with abominations, to obtrude himself before the altar, to force even God himself, if the expression may be allowed, into familiarity with a soul polluted with guilt, and at the same time not to feel the least compunction, nor to entertain the most distant resolution of forsaking his evil ways?

The man who is faithful to the law of the Lord is abashed and confounded in the presence of the Most High; he cries out in the words of St. Peter: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a mortal man and a sinner"—*Luke*, v, 8; or in the words of the Psalmist: "Turn away thy face from my sins... create in me a clean heart"—*Ps.*, l, 11, 12: and is it not an almost unpardonable outrage offered to the sanctity of the holy mysteries, that the avowed sinner should present himself without a blush?

For what is the object that brings him to the temple of

God? It is to offer up with the priest in a spiritual manner the holy sacrifice: to present to God the blood of his Son as the price of his redemption: to appease his anger by the dignity and excellence of the offerings: and to represent to him the title which he has to his mercies, now that he is purified by the blood of the victim, and is united with him? Ah! if he appears before him with a defiled and hardened heart—if he is a stranger to the sentiments of piety and to the desires of amendment, he disowns the ministry of the priest who offers sacrifice in his name; he disavows the prayers which are poured forth to God; he refuses to entreat him to look down propitiously on the sacred oblations, and to accept them as the price and ransom of his sins; he abuses the love of Jesus Christ, who renews the great sacrifice of his redemption; and offers him to his Father as a portion of that Church without spot or wrinkle, which he cleansed and purified with his precious blood: he imposes on the Church, which, relying on the supposition that he is united with her in the bonds of faith and charity, pours forth in his name acts expressing the most lively sentiments of piety, sorrow, and compunction. Thus it is that the unrepenting sinner is, as it were, an anathema in the midst of his brethren—a man who mingles insults with the canticles of praise which are offered up to the Deity.

What conclusion are we to draw from this statement? That we ought to absent ourselves from the places of divine worship when we are defiled with sin? God forbid! Then it is that we should enter immediately into dispositions of repentance, and fly to the altar of grace and mercy: then it is that we should throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus, and solicit his forgiveness: then it is that we should embrace every means which religion provides for effecting our reconciliation with Heaven. For, were we not to fly to the altar, whither could we go? Here alone it is that the sinner can find relief: this is his only asylum: here it is that flow the life-giving waters of the sacraments, which are to purify his conscience and loosen his bands: here it is that is offered up the sacrifice of propitiation which is to appease the anger of God, excited by his sins: here it is that he is to be roused to a hatred of sin and a love of virtue by the animated exhortations of his pastor: here it is that his ignorance is to be enlightened, his errors unfolded, his weakness strengthened, and his good desires matured: here it is, in a word, that religion provides a remedy for all his disorders. Sinners, therefore, are to be particularly diligent in their attendance; and the more they are attached to their bad habits, the more speedy

ought they be in their application for a cure. But if it be an irreverence offered to the sanctity of our temples and mysteries to come with hearts professedly defiled with sin, without remorse, and without any desire of amendment, what a crime must it be to select the holy place, and the time of the celebration of the tremendous sacrifice, for the time and place to instil into the minds of others the most dangerous passions, to indulge in wanton glances of the eye, and to take pleasure in criminal desires! Surely such a crime as this is perverting all the blessings of Heaven: it is crucifying again the Lord of Glory in the very place in which he daily makes an offering of himself to his Father for our salvation: it is devoting the time which is employed in celebrating the holy mysteries of our redemption to the worst of all works—even that of promoting our condemnation: it is selecting the presence of the Great Judge as the fittest occasion to offer him the greatest insult: and surely such a crime as this is deserving of the severest judgments of the Almighty.

Let us, my Christian brethren, avoid with the greatest care every species of irreverence and profanation. Let us enter the house of God animated with the spirit of prayer, of compunction, of recollection, adoration, and praise. Let us always endeavour to obtain an increase of grace, for here is the throne of mercy. Let us not desist until we have acquired a new relish for heavenly things, and redoubled our desires of forsaking our evil ways, and of attaching ourselves solely to our only good. Let us say, in the words of Queen Sheba to Solomon: "O blessed are thy servants, who stand always before thee."—3 *Kings*, x, 8.

If any of you are prevented by the duties of your state from presenting yourselves daily before him in his holy temple, let your desires at least, like those of the Israelites in captivity be always turned towards it. Thus will our altars be your sweetest consolation in distress, your asylum in tribulation, your resource in affliction. Thus will you enjoy on earth a foretaste of that unutterable peace, of which you hope to enjoy the plentitude and consummation in the company of the blessed in the eternal temple of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

XLIX.—TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON PRAYER.

"The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven, but struck his breast, saying; O God, be merciful to me a sinner."—*Luke*, xviii, 13.

This is the prayer of an humble penitent, who is convinced both of the enormity of his transgressions, and of his total dependence on the mercies of his injured Lord. It is what the Church proposes to us on this day as a model of perfect prayer, and as a powerful example to encourage us to have recourse to and familiarize ourselves with a practice of all others the most essential to Christian piety.

Prayer is necessary for man in his present state of existence; it is the only resource and consolation of man: it is the whole man, according to the language of the Spirit of God.

The Christian, consequently, must be a man of prayer: he is admonished of this duty by everything both within and without: his own weakness and corruption remind him of his incapacity to withstand the enemies of his salvation; and the dangerous and numerous temptations which assail him on every side, convince him of the necessity of lifting up his hands to that Great and Supreme Being, from whom alone assistance can be obtained.

In this state of absolute dependence, is it not astonishing, my beloved, that any Christian should be found of such an indolent and listless disposition as to neglect a duty which is so very essential and full of comfort? And yet it is neglected by the greater number, and neglected as a thing that is irksome and unnecessary.

We will investigate the causes of this fatal neglect. They neglect, in the first place, because they pretend that they know not how to pray; and secondly, because they experience no consolation in it, on account of the incessant distractions to which they are subject in time of prayer. Their reason, as I observed, for neglecting it in the first instance is, because they know not how to pray; and to this I shall now call your attention, reserving the observations I have to make to you on the other head to some future opportunity.

1. "The commandment that I command thee this day," said the Lord to the Israelites, "is not above thee, nor far off

from thee; nor is it in Heaven, that thou shouldst say: Which of us can go up to Heaven to bring it to us, and we may hear and fulfil it in work? Nor is it beyond the sea, that thou mayest excuse thyself, and say: Which of us can cross the sea and bring it to us, that we may hear and do that which is commanded? But the word is very nigh to thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."—*Deut.*, xxx, 11, *et seq.*

These words, which were spoken of the precepts of the law in general, may with peculiar propriety be applied to the duty of prayer: "it is in *our* mouths and in *our* hearts, that *we* may do it."

Christians plead for an exemption from prayer, on the pretext that they know not how to pray. But a thorough investigation of the subject will convince you that this pretext is not grounded in truth, or in fact that it cannot be brought forward as a plea for an exemption.

In the first place, they are deceived in their notions of prayer. They imagine that prayer requires a great exertion of the understanding, that it must be composed with order and elegance, and that it cannot properly be performed without an extensive acquaintance with the mysteries and councils of God. But this is not by any means the case. Prayer is the simple language of the heart—the tender sighs of a soul lamenting her innumerable weaknesses and defects, and entreating to be delivered from them. Prayer does not require in the person who prays, either more refined talents, more extensive learning, or a more cultivated genius than what are possessed by other men: it requires only a more lively faith, a more sincere grief for past sins, and more ardent desires to be delivered from them for the time to come. Prayer is not a science that is to be learned from men; nor an art that is to be acquired from books or study. No, by no means. The knowledge of it is instilled into our very being, the rules of it are engraven on the heart, and the only master who can teach it is the Spirit of God.

The simple and unlearned disciple of Jesus, who is awed by the supreme majesty of his Maker; who trembles before the tribunal of his justice, and who is affected by the consideration of his mercies; whose spiritual wisdom extends no further than to the science of annihilating himself in his presence, of confessing with all simplicity his wonders and his love, of adoring the ordinances of his holy providence, and of accepting from his hands with resignation the crosses and afflictions which he sends; whose prayer is excellent and sublime, only because it proceeds from a heart that is

impressed with the most lively conviction of its own weakness and corruption, and is anxiously solicitous to redeem the time that is lost, and to live for him alone.

Such a disciple as this is infinitely more learned in the science of prayer than the art of man can make him. Such a disciple as this may say in the words of David: "I have understood more than all my teachers."—*Ps.*, cxviii, 99. He speaks to God as friend speaks to friend; he grieves because he has offended him, and because he has not sufficient courage to renounce all things for his sake; he utters the feelings of his heart and opens his breast to the sweetest transports of love in the presence of his beloved; he is not discouraged even by distractions; he feels indeed the weight of his chains, but he exerts himself with redoubled energy to break them asunder and regain his liberty. My beloved, the whole secret, the whole science of prayer, is this. And is there any thing in it that exceeds the powers even of the most ignorant Christian?

The publican, in the gospel of this Sunday, received no instructions about the method of prayer. The conviction of his own unworthiness, the love of God, the confidence and the desire of being heard by him, were his only tutors: he expressed the feelings of his heart, and his prayer was sublime.

Ah! if it were necessary to be raised to that high eminence of perfection to which some few chosen souls have been raised; if it were necessary to be ravished, like St. Paul, up to the third Heaven, and to hear secrets which God has not disclosed to man, and which are beyond the powers of man to reveal; if it were necessary to be seated on a cloud of glory, like Moses on the Mount, and see God face to face; or, in other words, if it were necessary to be admitted to such an intimate state of union with God as to be disengaged as it were from the shackles of the body—to be exalted even to the throne of God—and to contemplate at leisure his infinite perfections—to forget in some degree this earthly frame—to be neither concerned nor solicitous about sensual enjoyments—to be fixed, and in a manner absorbed in sublime meditations on the wonders and majesty of the Deity, and, as if already partaking of eternity, to consider an age spent in that happy communication as no more than a short and fleeting moment; if, I say, in order to pray, it were necessary to be favoured with these choice and excellent gifts of the Spirit of God, then you might say with reason, like the new converts in the Acts of the Apostles (*Acts*, xix, 2), that you had not received them, and that you knew not the spirit from whom they were to be received.

But prayer is not a gift of this kind; prayer is not a gift that is imparted only to a few chosen souls. It is an universal gift; it is a common duty imposed on all men; it is an indispensable duty; it is necessary for the imperfect as well as for the perfect; it is attainable to the unlearned as well as to the learned; it is required of the simple as well as the most enlightened; it is within the reach of all; it is the science of every Christian; it is a perfection which every human creature can possess. Every created being that is capable of knowing and loving the author of his existence — every created being that is capable of discerning his own weakness and nothingness, and the majesty and infinity of his Creator, is bound to know how to adore him, to return him thanks, to apply to him for help, to appease him when he has been offended, to call after him when he seems to have withdrawn himself, to be grateful for all his blessings, to be humbled when he inflicts punishment, to expose his necessities before him, and to solicit the continuation of his gracious protection in a fresh supply and constant renewal of his tender mercies.

When the apostles besought our Lord to teach them how to pray, his instructions were conformable to this description. He did not open their minds to contemplate the sublimity and the depth of the mysteries of God; on the contrary, he taught them to pray as if they were speaking to a tender, compassionate, and loving Father; to present themselves before him with a respectful familiarity, and with confidence seasoned with fear and love; and to apply to the heart for words and expressions to signify their necessities and desires; he taught them to pray for blessings of the most important nature, that his holy name might be adored and praised by all men—that his kingdom might be established in all hearts—that Heaven and earth might be obedient to his holy will—that sinners might return to the ways of justice—that infidels might come to the knowledge of the truth—that he would forgive their offences—that he would preserve them in the time of temptation—that he would succour their weakness—and that he would deliver them from all evil. There is nothing in this method but what is simple; and yet it is noble; it recals man to himself; and nothing is wanting to enable us to pursue it but an humble sense and acknowledgment of our own infirmities, and an earnest sincere desire to get rid of them.

2. This, I say, is all that is wanted. For does not the sick man know how to ask for medical assistance? Does not the distressed pauper know how to solicit relief? Yes; necessity teaches them: the evils they endure inspire them with that

true eloquence, those presuasive gestures, those pressing remonstrances which are calculated to gain attention. The afflicted need no master to teach them how to mourn. Every word, every action bespeaks their grief; even their silence is a kind of utterance.

It is the same with us in temporal afflictions. When illness threatens us with immediate dissolution, when unexpected occurrences expose our wealth and property to dangers, when death is on the point of depriving us of a friend who is near and dear to us—ah! then we lift up our hands to Heaven in fervent supplication to the God of mercies; then we know how to pray without the aid of an instructor.

Were we as easily affected by the distresses of the soul as we are by those of the body—were we as much interested about eternal salvation as we are about the transitory possessions of the earth, we should be sufficiently learned in the science of prayer. Far from complaining, as we do, of not knowing how to pray whenever we come to address our Maker, on whom alone is our dependence for all things, we should not know how to contain ourselves; we should not be able to repress our grief and lamentations, nor to moderate the excess of our love and gratitude towards him. Truly, my brethren, there cannot be a stronger indication of the weakness of our faith, and of our utter ignorance of the perilous situation in which we are, than the difficulty we experience in keeping our attention fixed for the space of a short prayer.

For, straitened as we are on every side, in constant danger of being seduced by the allurements of the world, of being led astray by the influence of bad example, of being subject to the tyranny of corrupt nature, and to the empire of flesh and blood; powerfully disposed as we are to become elated by affluence, and depressed by want; to be flattered by applause, and exasperated by contempt; to neglect the service of an invisible Creator, and to seek our consolation in the enjoyment of visible things; in such a situation, is it possible that we should be at a loss what to say, and what to ask for, when we appear before the Lord in prayer? O my God!—why is man so wretched, or why has he not the sense to feel that he is wretched?

Ah! were we to say that we did not know *where to begin;* that our necessities and weaknesses were so numerous that it was impossible to represent them all to our gracious Lord; that the more we scrutinized, the greater corruption, the greater disorders we discovered within us; that, despairing of being able to make a full exposure of our hearts, we pre-

sented them before him in silence and with humility: and that, overpowered by the multiplicity of the petitions that we ought to make, the power of utterance was taken away from us; if this were our language, we should speak the language of piety. It was in this manner that the penitent David addressed himself to his injured Lord (*Ps.*, xxxviii, 3, *et seq*): "I was dumb, and was humbled," he exclaimed, "and my sorrow was renewed." I meditated on thy mercies and my ingratitude, and "my heart grew hot within me; I spoke with my tongue," but in the humiliation of my soul I could only say, that "all things are vanity—every man living." This penitential silence was the most acceptable prayer in the sight of God.

But shall we say that no subject of prayer presents itself to our minds when we prostrate ourselves before the Lord? Let us look back on our past lives? We shall there probably discover sufficient reasons to induce us to dread the just judgments of God, and to sue for his mercies. Our whole time, perhaps, has been alienated from him; we have abused his gifts; we have preferred vanity and worldly pleasures before him; we have defiled our bodies; we have neglected his grace and inspirations; we have perverted the faculties of our souls, and acted contrary to those favourable inclinations to virtue which he implanted in our nature. The recollection of all these is certainly sufficient to furnish ample subject for prayer, and to compel us to throw ourselves at his feet, and with loud cries and supplications to solicit his pardon. If we can think of these things, and yet complain that we have nothing to say to a God whom we have so often and so long offended, it is a sign either that our salvation is hopeless, or that we imagine it may be obtained from other sources than those of his clemency and mercy.

I say more. If we have been so happy as to receive a discharge from this heavy debt of guilt, and by the assistance of God have been able to renounce the vanities of the world, and to commence a life of piety, it is still more inexcusable to complain that we cannot pray. For, my beloved, we have been favoured with a most extraordinary blessing; we have been snatched from the brink of a most frightful precipice; we have been made partakers of a grace which is seldom granted to sinners. Now, if after all these favours and all this love, we are not more animated, more inflamed, more delighted in the presence of our disinterested benefactor than the sinner, we are unmindful of his gifts, and are guilty of the basest ingratitude.

Ah! if we had a proper sense of the disorderly inclinations

which, notwithstanding our change of life, still maintain their influence, and are continually endeavouring to seduce us from the law of God; if we were truly conscious of the weakness and corruption which remain within us, and threaten to subvert the edifice of piety we have raised, we should not only be able to entertain ourselves with God for a short time, but we should pray always. The dangers which surround us on every side, the secret temptations and desires, which remind us that the man of sin is not banished from our hearts, would cause us to sigh continually after him from whom alone deliverance is to come. We should pray in every place. Everything would remind us of God, because everything would remind us of our own weakness.

If, however, our own evils are not sufficient to fix our attention in prayer, we may turn our thoughts to the evils which the Church endures—to the spirit of schism and revolt which has made such dreadful ravages—to the spirit of irreligion and immorality which exists among her children—to the progress of infidelity—to the almost entire extinction of faith which has taken place in the world. We may lament over the scandals which we daily witness. We may complain to the Lord, with the prophet, that all have abandoned him; that all are attentive to their worldly interests alone; that the salt of the earth has lost its savour; and that the pastor is not more virtuous than the people. We may entreat the Lord to place over us religious princes, zealous pastors, and enlightened teachers; we may pray for the peace of the Church, for the extirpation of errors, for the conversion of the innumerable souls that have been seduced from the religion of their forefathers to the wild and incoherent doctrines of self-appointed reformers.

We may pray for our relations, friends, enemies, and benefactors. We may pray for the conversion of those to whom we have been the occasion of sin; for those who are placed over us; for those who are committed to our charge, and for whose souls we shall have to render an account. These are great, these are interesting subjects for prayer; and are they not sufficient to excite our solicitude, and fix our attention even for one half hour? Surrounded as we are on every side by objects that teach us how to pray, and that seem to exhort us to elevate our hearts to God, is it possible that we can have nothing to say to him when we appear in his presence? Ah! my brethren, the man that finds such difficulty in entertaining himself with his Lord and Maker, is certainly far removed from him: the man that is at a loss for words in the presence of such a friend and benefactor,

must be almost an entire stranger to the feelings of holy love.

3. Were we, indeed, to extend our inquiry, we should discover that this want of love is one of the principal causes why we cannot pray. The heart delights to entertain itself with the object of its love: if God were this object, it would be ingenious in its endeavours to approach him and enjoy the sweets of his presence; it would not be in want of words to express its amorous transports. Let us set our inward house in order; let us substitute God instead of the world in our affections; then we shall know how to pray; then we shall become familiarized with this necessary science. It is not in the nature of things that we should be earnest in our petitions for those blessings which we do not value; that we should meditate on those truths which do not interest us; that we should importunately solicit to be delivered from passions which we do not hate. No; prayer is the language of love; and if we know not how to pray, the reason is because we know not how to love. Let us, therefore, in the first place, acquire this important science; we shall then be able to pray; and by the means of that prayer we shall be able to obtain every blessing in this life, and eternal happiness in the next.

L.—ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER.

"And they brought to him one deaf and dumb; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him."—*Mark* vii, 32.

The diligence with which the Jews applied to our Lord for the cure of the corporal diseases of their friends, is descriptive of that earnest solicitude with which we ought to apply to him for the cure of the far more grievous disorders which afflict our souls. He is our true physician; he is the good Samaritan that came down from Heaven to heal our infirmities. He beholds the dangers to which we are exposed, and incessantly solicits us to have recourse to him: "Come to me, and I will refresh you."

But, great as our spiritual necessities are, how few of us apply to the throne of mercies for relief with that earnestness which a proper sense of our miseries ought to inspire? The greater part of mankind pray not at all; others pretend that they know not how to pray: and others are deterred from prayer by the distractions and dryness which they always

experience when they attempt to raise up their minds to God. Your attention was called to this subject last Sunday; I will now resume the thread of my discourse, and will prove that distractions are not a justifiable pretext for the neglect of prayer.

I. One of the greatest evils which sin has entailed upon us, is that distaste for prayer and for the things of God of which we complain. Had we remained in the state of innocence in which our first parents were created, our sweetest enjoyment would have been to commune with God; the whole creation would have been like an open book, in which we should have incessantly meditated on his wonderful works; our whole lives would have been spent in the contemplation of his perfections; and we should have been happy in our innocence, chiefly because he would have communicated himself to us in the most intimate manner, and have permanently fixed his abode in our souls.

How great, therefore, must the change be that has been wrought in our souls by sin—how must we be fallen from our former state, that the very duty which ought to constitute our felicity should be considered painful and wearisome? Such, however, is the state to which our nature is unfortunately reduced. All men feel a distaste for prayer; even they who are habituated to the service of God are frequently disturbed with so many and such importunate distractions, that they enjoy neither satisfaction nor consolation in the performance of this essential duty; and hence a pretext is formed to curtail or to neglect it altogether.

Now to neglect prayer on account of the distractions or dryness that we may experience in it, is wholly unjustifiable; because these distractions and this dryness arise either, first, from our tepidity and failings; or, secondly, from our being in a manner wholly disused to prayer; or, thirdly, from the wisdom and goodness of God, who withdraws for a time the sensible consolations that are to be found in prayer for the exercise of patience in the hearts of his faithful servants.

The first and most ordinary cause of our distractions is the tepidity and infidelities to which we are subject. How is it possible that we should apply to prayer with a mind tranquil and serene, with an imagination undisturbed by the phantoms which surround it, with a heart prepared and disposed to enjoy the presence of God, at a time when we are engaged in a constant round of dissipation; when we live in the midst of objects the most calculated to inflame the imagination, and to make impressions on the mind which no time

will obliterate; when we harbour in our breasts, I will not say criminal, but improper attachments, which divide our affections, which occupy our thoughts, and which either weaken or entirely destroy our relish for the things of eternity.

Ah! if the most retired and holy penitents, if fervent solitaries, if an Anthony in the midst of the desert, if a Jerome, worn out and emaciated by constant study and unremitted austerity, if such men as these were disturbed in the midst of their sweet communications with God, by the troublesome recollection of past events, can it be expected that we, surrounded as we are by objects which engage our whole thoughts, which occupy our whole minds, that we, I say, should become new men at the moment that we go to pray—that we should be able to renounce in an instant, all the affections which defiled and corrupted our hearts—that we should totally forget the world and all the vanities we had witnessed—that we should be on a sudden penetrated with divine love, or overwhelmed with sorrow for infidelities to which we are as much attached as ever; or that we should be at liberty to enjoy a tranquillity of mind and heart, which is not always the lot of the greatest saints in the deepest recesses of retirement? Oh! how unjustifiable are we, if we take occasion from our multiplied distractions to neglect the great duty of prayer! How plainly shall we perceive hereafter, that we ourselves were the cause of all that we at present so much complain of.

But let us enter a little more minutely into this part of the subject. We complain that we are unable to keep our attention; and that distractions take possession of our thoughts, notwithstanding all our efforts to resist them. Now, let me ask you, how is it possible that we should be recollected and attentive in prayer, if our thoughts are distracted and occupied at all other times; if we do not enter into ourselves, and fix our thoughts on God from time to time in the midst of our ordinary employments; if we do not accustom ourselves to that interior recollection, that life of faith, which, in the midst even of the dissipations of the world, discovers abundant sources of pious reflections?

In order to be free from distractions in prayer, we ought to go to prayer without distractions: we ought always to have a guard upon our thoughts: in our communication with sinners, we ought to take occasion from their cares, their fears, their hopes, their solicitudes, their miseries, to raise up our hearts to God, and fix our minds on that place of rest, where sorrows will be no more. Were we constant in this practice,

we should find little difficulty in collecting our wandering thoughts when we began to pray: we should easily forget the world, and all its toilsome vanities and follies, when we prostrated ourselves at the feet of God: and what is more, the pious reflections that we had made, the tears that we had shed over the blindness and immoralities of mankind, would cause us to fly with more pleasure to the cross of Jesus; would contribute to wean our hearts from dissipation and vanity; would convince us that no happiness was to be expected from the world; would induce us to return thanks to the Lord with greater fervour for the inestimable blessing of piety and love which he has bestowed upon us in preference to so many thousands who walk in the broad road; and would cause us to behold in a clearer light the happy state of the man who serves God, and despises all created things in order to live for him alone.

In the second place, we complain that we not only enjoy no pleasure in prayer, but that we are diverted from it by an insuperable aversion and disgust. That these should be your feelings is not surprising. Your hearts are centred in the world; your attachments are sensual; your affections are earthly; and your love is self-interested. Riveted, therefore, as you are to created things, how is it possible that you should enjoy the sweets of heaven? The whole capacity of your souls is occupied by creatures; and where shall a place be found for God? Ah! you cannot enjoy at the same time both God and the world. When the Israelites had passed the Jordan, and had tasted the milk and honey of the promised land, the manna, says the scripture, fell no more; so contrary is it to the rules of unerring wisdom to give a relish for the things both of this world and the next to any individual at the same time.

The love of the world is like a burning fever. It pervades every part of the soul; it causes her to languish and droop; it creates a loathing for the spiritual nourishment of prayer, and an indifference about the good things of eternity. If, therefore you perceive in yourselves symptoms of this apathy and indifference, it is a sign that the soul is disordered; that an interior fever, hitherto unnoticed, debilitates her powers; and that the love of creatures occupies the throne which belongs to God alone. Purify your hearts from every worldly affection; renounce every criminal attachment, and you will soon taste the sweets and consolations of prayer; you will soon discover that Jesus alone is amiable; and you will soon love him fervently when your affections are bent upon no other object.

Is it not true that, on those occasions when you had performed some signal act of charity, or offered up to God the sacrifice of your will, of your pleasures, and of your passions, you prayed with more attention, tranquillity, and delight? The servant that has recently given extraordinary proofs of fidelity to his master, presents himself before him with confidence and satisfaction; but the servant who has given cause for reproof by his negligence and dishonesty, dreads the presence of his master; he hides himself, like our first parent after his transgression; he cannot speak to him with that freedom and pleasure which is inspired by a pure and irreproachable conscience.

When our Lord commanded us to pray, he at the same time inculcated the necessity of watching: "Watch and pray"—*Matt.*, xxvi, 41: giving us to understand that the sweets and consolations of prayer are not to be experienced unless we keep a constant watchfulness over ourselves. I allow that prayer is a necessary means to enable us to watch over the motions of the soul, and to keep steadily on in a course of virtue; but, at the same time, I say that without this vigilance we never shall be in a condition to pray to any real purpose. Both are essentials, and both inseparably united; prayer alone can obtain the gift of watchfulness; and watchfulness alone can insure to us the interior comfort which is felt in prayer.

Hence we must conclude, that were there no other effect produced by leading a dissipated and worldly life than an incapacity of attending properly to the sacred duty of prayer, such a life, however free it may be from excess, however innocent it may be in other respects, is a life of sin—a life which will inevitably be succeeded by the second and eternal death. Salvation cannot be attained without earnest prayer and without perseverance in prayer; any state, consequently, that opposes an effectual obstacle to prayer opposes an effectual obstacle to salvation. Suffer not yourselves, therefore, my beloved, to be the victims of delusion; but examine the causes of the distractions and dryness which attend you at the time of prayer. If you discover that they arise from the ardour of your worldly affections and from the multiplicity of your failings, give yourselves no rest until you have removed these impediments and given liberty to your souls; for thus only is salvation to be attained.

2. A second cause of distractions in the time of prayer arises from not devoting sufficient time to that holy exercise. The man that praysbut seldom, will not pray with devotion. Frequent prayer alone tranquillizes the mind, and effaces the

impressions which it receives from the gay and airy phantoms of the world. Frequent and persevering prayer alone pierces the clouds, and ascends even to the throne of the Most High. Frequent practice alone can make us familiar with prayer; and familiarity alone can impart consolation and delight in the performance of it. To a man that prays but seldom, God is always a stranger; in his presence he will always be uneasy and restrained; he will not be able to pour forth the effusions of his heart before him, nor treat him with that freedom and confidence which inspires delight. The Lord must be known before he can be loved. The world, indeed, loses its attractive charms in proportion as it is known; the deeper you drink of the cup of its pretended delights, the greater will be your disappointment, your satiety and disgust. But you must know the Lord, you must enjoy him familiarly, before you will experience all his sweetness: "taste and see," says the prophet, "how sweet is the Lord."—*Ps.*, xxxiii, 9. The more you know him, the more you will love him; the more closely you are united to him, the more convinced you will be that the only true happiness to be enjoyed on earth is in knowing and loving him alone.

Frequent prayer, therefore, is alone attended with satisfaction and delight. In fact, who are they that complain of this dryness, this apathy in prayer? They are the Christians who pray but seldom—who devote only a few moments to it at stated times—who pray with haste and with an unwilling mind—who make no efforts to subject their minds to it—and who, so far from thinking that the repugnance which they feel to prayer ought to make them more attentive to it, take occasion from thence to neglect it altogether.

But how can a person in the world, you say, find time for long and frequent prayer? How can he find time, do you say? My beloved, why is time given you? Is it not that you may be enabled to obtain the pardon of your sins, and prepare yourselves for happiness hereafter? Is it not that you may live a truly Christian life, and lay up a store of good works for Heaven? Ah! you can find time in abundance to solicit favours from the world, to visit friends and relations, to spend in pastimes and sloth. And besides all this, you have many idle moments in the day; you have many tedious hours in the course of the year; and supposing even that your whole time was devoted to the business of your calling, there is a great proportion of the day when without any inconvenience, your hearts might be occupied occasionally with God in prayer! Ah! you have time for everything except for the one thing necessary; salvation is

the only business that cannot be attended to. Truly are you to be pitied who can find so many moments for the world, and can find none for Heaven.

3. It, however, not unfrequently happens, that men the most regular, the most devoted to the service of God, and the most constant in the duty of prayer, experience a kind of apathy, and are disturbed by a multiplicity of distractions. But in persons of this description the cause of this apathy and of these distractions is not the world, but the merciful providence of God, who makes use of these means to purify their souls, and to lead them more securely to that happy state which he has prepared for them. Instead, therefore, of being discouraged, they ought to persevere in prayer more cheerfully than if the Lord visited them with sensible consolations.

For, in the first place, this dryness in prayer is a just punishment for former crimes. Is it not reasonable, my brethren, that God should chastise the pleasures of a worldly life by mingling bitterness in the cup of piety? Perhaps the weakness of your constitution will not allow you to atone for your sins by corporal austerities; and can you complain if God is pleased to substitute in their place the interior pains and afflictions of the mind? Is it to be expected that he will transport the soul in an instant from the pleasures of the world to the enjoyments of piety—from the flesh-pots of Egypt to the milk and honey of the land of promise—and not rather, that he will previously cause her to undergo the dryness and fatigues of the desert.

In the second place, you refuse to return to God for a long time, notwithstanding the most importunate solicitations of his grace; you suffered him to continue knocking at the door of your heart unnoticed before you opened it to him: you hesitated, you wavered, you doubted, you deferred for a length of time before you took the final resolution of entering into his service. And is it not just that he should suffer you to continue your solicitations for a short time, before he makes you partakers of his consolations? Are not your delays deserving of some delays on his part?

But, without insisting on these reasons, there are others that call for your consideration. Perhaps you are deprived of these consolations in order that your affections may be more completely weaned from the things of this world, and that you may be induced to sigh more ardently for that happy abode where you will behold your God face to face, and be for ever intimately united with him. Perhaps the only reason why you are deprived of this interior comfort is, that you may

feel a greater compunction for the sins which have created this opposition and this antipathy to the things of God; that your piety may be purified from the dross of self-love; and that you may seek God alone in your return to him. Piety that is supported only by consolations and delights will not last long. Duties that are fulfilled only because they are pleasing, will soon be neglected.

You are taught, moreover, that you must desire to please God, and not yourselves, when you pray. Provided, therefore, this object is attained, it matters not whether the effect is produced at a time when your minds are clouded with distractions, or cheered by a ray of divine comfort. Now God considers the heart alone: if the heart be upright and constant in his service—if the sole object of your prayers be to obtain from God the perfect cure of all your spiritual disorders, your applications to the throne of mercy will be as favourably received, and will be as agreeable to the Deity when you languish under distractions and dryness, as when your breast is overflowing with the most pious transports of delight. And what is more, the prayer which is offered up in this manner is more agreeable to him, provided you submit to the painful privation with patience and cheerfulness.

Pray, therefore, my beloved, with all instance. Whether you are sinners, or whether you are penitents; whether you are in prosperity or in adversity, in joy or in affliction, whether you taste the sweets of piety, or are disturbed by distractions and dislikes, pray with all instance. Prayer alone will enable you to conquer your failings, and to resist temptations: prayer alone will obtain for you the grace of perseverance, and the blessings of Heaven. Prayer is the duty of all states and of all conditions. Prayer is the soul of piety, the support of virtue, the foundation of religion. Pray, therefore, I say again, with all instance. Pray that the Holy Ghost would infuse into your souls the spirit of fervent prayer, and that he would graciously please to purify your hearts and lips, that your sacrifice of praise and supplication may be worthy of that weight of glory which he has in store for all who ask it as they ought, in an humble, religious, and devout manner, nothing wavering, with all earnestness and perseverance, as best pleasing to him, and most essentially conducive to their own eternal interests.

LI.—TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON A VIGILANT ATTENTION TO THE MEANS OF INSURING OUR SALVATION.

"A certain lawyer stood up, and tempting him, said: Master, wha shall I do, to obtain eternal life?"—*Luke*, x, 25.

Here, my beloved, is an important question indeed: a question, which comprises everything that is worthy of your attention, everything that is worthy of your solicitude:—"What shall we do to obtain eternal life?" Were we possessed of all other knowledge, and ignorant on this subject, it would avail us nothing. Were we to be successful in our attempts to obtain honours, riches, and glory, and neglect the great business of our salvation, it would avail us nothing.

This is a truth which you all acknowledge. You know the importance of salvation, and you desire to obtain it. But this knowledge, and this desire, do not induce you to make those serious inquiries which a Christian is bound to make. So far from considering whether you have attained a true knowledge of the means of salvation, or whether the path in which you are walking is secure, you conclude that everything is right, provided you are walking in the highway of the world. But, my beloved, where is your prudence? In the affairs of this world you are circumspect to a degree of nicety; and are the affairs of the next world less worthy of your attention? Shall the short-lived interests of time exclusively engage you, while the momentous interests of eternity are neglected? As Christians it is your duty to pursue a very different mode of conduct. It is your duty to make salvation your great and principal business, and diligently to inform yourselves of what you are to do to obtain eternal life. For this purpose it is your duty, in the first place, to study well the lessons of gospel morality, with a resolution to practise them; and secondly, to act conformably to those lessons, leaving nothing to hazard, but always preferring security to danger, certainty to uncertainty and mere possibility. Considerations on these two points shall form the subject of this discourse.

1. Every Christian, before he determines, is bound to deliberate, and not rely on the opinion or example of others on the subject where his all is at stake for eternity. The just man is characterized in the scriptures as a prudent and

thoughtful man, who calculates, who compares, who examines, who proves what is best; who does not trust lightly to every spirit, who bears before him the lamp of faith to enlighten his steps, and to discover the dangers that threaten him. The sinner, on the other hand, is characterized as a foolish man, who rushes heedlessly forward, and in the most perilous track runs on with the same blind confidence as if he were in the most unerring paths. "A wise man feareth, and declineth from evil: the fool leapeth over, and is confident."—*Prov.*, xiv. 16.

It is in this thoughtless and precipitate manner that many of you proceed in the great business of salvation. In all your worldly concerns you are prudent, quick-sighted, and provident: in the business of eternity alone you are rash and improvident. For instance, you are constantly admonished by the minister of the gospel, that a worldly life—I mean a life which is devoted to the world, to its cares, pleasures, and vanities, without any regard to the will of God, or to the salvation of your souls—is not such a life as a Christian ought to lead, even although it be not marked with any criminal excess; and consequently, that such a life is hateful in the sight of God, and deserving of his future judgments. This is the doctrine of religion you profess. This is a truth which has been instilled into your minds from your earliest years. The world, on the other hand, contends that every one ought to live according to his rank and fortune, and that it would be singular and inconsistent with real virtue to reject the maxims and customs which are adopted by all other men beside yourselves.

Here, then, the question for you to decide upon is, which of the two—the world or the minister of the gospel—is in the right. Now, supposing there were room for doubt, and the question had never been peremptorily decided, prudence seems to require, on account of the terrible alternative and the irreparable evils which would ensue from an erroneous decision, that you should seriously examine, and maturely weigh, the merits on both sides. It is reasonable to pause and to doubt, when opinions are directly opposite, and especially when the means of securing your salvation are the subject of the doubt. On your entrance, therefore, into the world, before you adopted its morality, its customs and maxims, did you compare and appreciate both authorities; and after impartially comparing them, did you really judge that the world was in the right, and that the minister of the gospel resisted the truth, and endeavoured to impose on your credulity?

The world advised you to court the smiles of fortune, to place your happiness in them, and, in order to obtain them, not to scruple at even dishonest means. Did you examine the doctrine of the gospel on this subject and find that it recommended the same as the world recommended? The world extolled luxury, magnificence, and sensual gratifications, and declared that you might, without sin, purchase those pleasures at any expense, provided you did not exceed your income, or injure your families. But did you, my beloved, look into the gospel; and if you did, are you sure that you did not observe in it an injunction to devote the temporal blessings of Providence to more pious uses? The world declared that it was not criminal to increase your patrimony by means that were not strictly equitable, and that nothing more was required than to avoid such injustices as are forbidden by the laws, although the laws take cognizance only of open fraud and violence. But were you authorized to believe that conscience had no other laws than those of the land, and that there was no other tribunal of equity than that of your country? The world maintained that an effeminate, indolent, and dissipated life, was not a sinful life, provided it was free from criminal excesses. But did you consider whether the doctrine which our Lord brought from Heaven was consonant with this new and dangerous doctrine of the world.

It too frequently happens that, in things relating to God and to salvation, Christians adopt opinions without examination, merely because they are adopted by others. They follow those who walk before them, without inquiring whither the path leadeth in which they are walking: they do not even inquire whether there is danger of their being led into an error: they are satisfied with knowing that there are other people in the same state as they are. But, my beloved, where is your reason on such occasions? In your worldly concerns you are sufficiently cautious. If asked to explain the motives of your conduct in any business where your interest is at stake, you bring forward the most solid and convincing reasons; you justify your conduct by the most incontrovertible arguments; you then show that you deliberate, and maturely weigh every circumstance before you engage in any undertaking. But if asked why, in the great business of salvation, you prefer the abuses, maxims, and customs of the world, before the examples of the saints and the rules of the gospel, you make no other reply than that times and manners are changed, that people in general live and act as you do, and that you ought not to be singular. Good God! of what avail are a sound judgment and a

good understanding, if they are displayed for no other purpose than to promote works which will perish with the authors of them? Truly, my beloved, with respect to this world you reason like men; but with respect to the other, like children.

Perhaps you will say, that you do not possess a greater share of wisdom and prudence than other men; that you cannot enter into discussions of a spiritual kind; that you cannot comprehend all those nice distinctions and subtleties which we are continually proposing to you; and that you do not think that piety depends upon such things.

But, beloved Christians, does it really require much comprehension to discover that the world is a dangerous and treacherous guide—that its maxims are reprobated in the school of Jesus; and that its customs can never do away the law of God? These are the plainest axioms of the gospel: these are the clearest truths in the science of salvation. If you sincerely desire to obtain a competent knowledge of your duties, you have nothing more to do than to proceed in the examination with candour and simplicity. Distinctions and subtleties will not be necessary, unless you wish to conceal from your eyes the true state of your interior, and to soften the rigour of the gospel down to the standard of your caprice and passions. Love the truth, and you will easily discover it. An upright heart is the best of teachers. Saul did not consult the witch of Endor as long as he was obedient to the commands of God, because he then discovered readily what his duty was; but when he had forsaken the ways of righteousness, then it was that doubts arose in his mind; then it was that he had recourse to the oracles of falsehood, in hopes of easing his mind, and of persuading himself that the law was favourable to his passions.

I do not mean to question the sincerity, or to censure the conduct of the timid Christian, who proposes difficulties, and seeks advice for the purpose of being enlightened and instructed; but this I will say, that the doubts and perplexities experienced by worldly men generally proceed from the corruption of their hearts, while they only propose to themselves to silence the importunity of conscience, and, by keeping to the letter more than to the spirit of the law, to escape from the remorse which attends open and deliberate transgressions. If, indeed, you seek God really and in earnest, and if your own powers of discernment are not sufficient to discover what is your duty, there are prophets in Israel: go, consult those who hold fast the form of sound words, and who teach the way of God

in truth: propose your difficulties, not with any false colouring, but candidly and openly: apply to God for his assistance, and if there be any variation in the decisions given by his ministers, adopt that which is the least favourable to self-love, as being the one which will remove danger to the greatest distance from you.

Beware of the example of Lot. He, when on the point of separating from Abraham, being allowed to choose the place of his abode, lifted up his eyes, says the sacred writer, before he made his choice, and beholding the plains watered throughout, even as the Paradise of the Lord, relinquished to Abraham the less pleasing country, and went and dwelt in Sodom, without inquiring whether his choice would expose him to danger. His imprudence soon met with punishment. In a short time he was carried away captive by the kings of the neighbouring cities: and no sooner was he delivered out of their hands, than he was necessitated to fly precipitately from the place he had chosen, to escape the avenging fire that fell from Heaven on that wicked city. So seldom it is that the decisions which accord with our inclinations are at the same time conformable to the rules of the gospel.

2. This is a truth which, considering the opposition that exists between corrupt nature and the gospel, cannot be disputed. And yet, Christians in general are guided in their decisions concerning duty by their inclinations, although they are conscious at the time that it would be less dangerous to decide contrary to their inclinations. In the common occurrences of life, you may easily discover the line of conduct which the gospel marks out as the safest to follow. You know the path in which Jesus Christ and his saints walked; his ministers frequently point it out to you: the success which crowned the labours of the saints invites you to walk in their footsteps. Thus it was, the apostle remarks, that the just men who are gone before you conquered the world, and obtained possession of the promises. You are convinced that, if you follow their examples, you will have every reason to hope for the same success; and that if you do not, you will have every reason to dread the worst consequences. In such an alternative as this can there be any room for hesitation?

Nevertheless, you will not choose the better part. You seem to prefer danger before safety. For instance, you are well assured that a life of dissipation and pleasure—a life that is devoted more to the world, and to the pursuit of wealth, than to the salvation of your souls, supposing that it be not otherwise criminal, is not the life which a Christian

ought to lead, and, consequently not to be depended on with too much confidence. At least you are well assured that neither Christ nor any of his saints lived in that manner. Were you to lead a more sober and Christian life you would have nothing to fear. This you know; and yet you prefer walking in an insecure path that is agreeable to your inclination before walking in a safe path that is painful to flesh and blood. You are well assured that if you refuse to coöperate with grace when it is given to you, it is very uncertain whether God will ever favour you with the same grace again; and that delay of repentance generally leads to final impenitence. You know that the only certain way to insure your salvation is to embrace the means as soon as they are offered; and yet you refuse to do this, rashly depending on the uncertainty which you know there is whether those means will be offered you again.

I will now submit two reflections to your serious consideration. First, supposing that your life were such as to make it equally doubtful whether you would be saved or lost, could you be said to have any real religion in you if you did not live in constant alarm? It is terrible to be in danger of eternal perdition; it is still more terrible to be walking in a path which, in the judgment of enlightened and pious men, is as likely to lead you to the abyss of hell as to the mansions of Heaven. Eternity is a thing of no small importance. As rational men, you ought to exercise every power of body and soul to put yourselves into the more favourable situation, and not to rest until there is a greater probability that you will be saved than that you will be eternally lost.

Secondly, what is the reason that you are solicitous to produce the most plausible arguments to justify a worldly life? You are either sincerely desirous of salvation, or you are indifferent about it. If salvation be really the object of your desires, adopt the means that will conduct you to it, and renounce everything that retards your arrival at it. Walk in the path which the Lord has traced out for you. Examine the conduct of the penitents of former times; they were no sooner enlightened by divine grace, and inspired to labour in earnest to make their calling and election sure, than they were convinced that the ways of the world were not the ways of God. They followed a more secure path; they relinquished the dissipations of a worldly life, and applied themselves more fervently and more constantly to prayer and good works; they renounced all indecency and vanity of dress, and placed a stricter guard over their senses; they substituted the spirit of Christian mortification in the place

of that love of ease and enjoyment which they formerly indulged; they followed the gospel instead of the world; they proceeded on the surest grounds, knowing that it was folly to expect to gain Heaven by those means by which others lost it.

But if you are indifferent about saving your souls, why do you employ mere sophistry to prove that your way of life is not in opposition to the gospel? Why do you torture yourselves with scruples, doubts, and anxieties? Why not endeavour to have your consolation here, since you have no other prospect but weeping and gnashing of teeth eternally hereafter? But no, my dearly beloved, I do not counsel you to throw yourselves after this manner into the abyss of endless woe. My only intention is to excite a dread and horror in your minds, and to compel you, as it were, to relinquish a way of life which will as infallibly lead you to the gates of perdition as a life of abandoned wickedness.

Listen, then, to the voice of conscience which interiorly admonishes you of the truth. It is not without reason that the Lord causes a few rays of light to shine occasionally upon you; he by this gives you to understand that he has not entirely forsaken you. Take care that you do not abuse this mercy by refusing to correspond with it at the present time in expectation of receiving it at a future period. You will then only have reason to hope for a thorough conversion, when you shall have begun the arduous task of working out your salvation. Begin it from this moment; begin it in earnest, and with a resolution to persevere. It is the only business worthy of your attention. Endeavour to discover the most effectual means of insuring success; and when you have discovered them, be not deterred by the prospect of difficulty from embracing them.

This, dear Christians, is the prudence which our Lord recommends to all his followers. Were you possessed of the most splendid talents, and capable of the greatest undertakings, if you exposed your salvation to danger, you would be more senseless than infants. Do not flatter yourselves with hopes because you are walking with the multitude; take no man for your guide whose life is not strictly regulated by the gospel. There are many ways, which are good and safe in the opinion of men, the ends whereof are death. The greater number of the reprobate suppose that they are walking in the path that leads to life; and when the sentence of condemnation is pronounced against them, they will express their astonishment, because they look forward with confidence during life to a share in the rewards of the just: *Lord! when*

did we see thee hungry? It is only by adopting the prudence of the gospel, and adhering strictly to its maxims, that you can reasonably hope for salvation. Be sincerely convinced of this, and you will be induced to live in such a manner as to secure to yourselves the possession of all that is valuable for eternity.

LII.—THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON HUMAN RESPECT.

"There is no one found to give glory to God but this stranger."—*Luke*, xvii, 18.

The example of the Samaritan, read in the gospel of this Sunday, is well worthy the consideration of every Christian. He was a man of a different religion and nation from his nine associates; he was at a distance from his family and friends; he was secluded from all society but that of his companions in affliction; in a word, by the circumstances in which he was placed, he was exposed to the greatest danger of being influenced by the conduct of others, and of being prevented from giving that glory to God which gratitude required. And yet he overcame every obstacle; he attended only to the call of duty; and, in obedience to it, immediately returned and threw himself at the feet of his benefactor.

There never, perhaps, was a time when human respect exercised such unlimited power over the minds of Christians as it does in the present age. Men who profess to be followers of the gospel are influenced in the performance of religious duties by the opinions and conduct of their neighbours; they hesitate to return to their Benefactor to give testimony of their gratitude for his blessings, unless their brethren who have been favoured with similar blessings return also; they are afraid of appearing openly in the cause of their Divine Master, and of strictly adhering to the maxims of the gospel; they are afraid of reproving the ways of the world, and of declaring against the lukewarmness of the imperfect Christian, lest they should be exposed to ridicule. They consult themselves in all they do; and what is worse, they consult their temporal in preference to their eternal welfare.

This, my beloved, is not an uncommon failing; it may even be said that there is hardly an individual who is not sometimes guilty of it in a greater or less degree. I will,

therefore, call your attention to this subject, and will endeavour to impress on your minds a full conviction of the enormity of the sin by demonstrating to you, in the first place, the insult that is offered to the majesty of God by human respect; and, secondly, the folly and impropriety of suffering ourselves to be influenced in any part of our religious conduct by the fears of what the world may think or say concerning us.

1. There are two ways by which the enemy of our salvation endeavours to undermine the happiness by imposing upon the natural weakness and credulity of man. His artifices are directed to the total and everlasting overthrow both of the good and the bad. The former he attempts to allure by setting before them the fascinating charms of the world; and, by the fallacious hopes which he continually holds out to them of the high and vivid enjoyment that is to be found in the circle of sensual gratification, he endeavours to withdraw them from the service of God. The latter he attempts to deter from entering upon a sincere and perfect change of life, by discouraging and intimidating them with vain fears and alarms. A simple acquaintance with the world is sufficient to secure the good from the danger of being overpowered by his mode of attack upon them, and to convince them that all that passes with time is vanity and affliction of spirit. But it is not easy for the bad to resist the attacks which they experience. The more we are acquainted with the world, the more we are liable to be intimidated by it; the deeper we drink of the cup of its pleasures, the more we are enslaved to it, and the more we are apt to be cautious and circumspect in entering upon a resolution to renounce it and return to our allegiance to the Lord of all.

This apprehension, or fear, prevents the conversion of thousands; and therefore we ought to be particularly guarded against it. It is highly criminal in the sight of God to suffer ourselves to be influenced by it, more so, perhaps, than the very sins of which we desire to repent. For, my brethren, the majesty of the God of Heaven forbids that the most distant comparison should be made between him and this contemptible world; and it requires that all the glory and honour that can be derived from men should appear to us like smoke when we reflect on the glory that is to be derived from serving him. Now the Christian who experiences within himself the sweet attractions of divine grace, and is withheld from following it by the fear of the world, not only makes a comparison between God and the world, but gives to the latter his decided preference. The sentiments which

influence his mind may be expressed in these words: "My God! I would willingly devote myself to thy service from this very hour, if I could possibly do it in my present circumstances. I would gladly renounce for ever a world which is become insipid and burthensome, if by this conduct I should not give occasion to the world to censure and deride me. I am convinced, it is true, that it is painful to be separated from thee; thou hast endued me with dispositions that are favourable to piety, and thou hast infused into my soul a secret detestation of those vices to which I have been so long enslaved; yet I continue to drag on my chains, although against my will, because the world, in the midst of which I am obliged to live, and which will not serve thee, is not pleased that I should serve thee. O Lord! if I was at liberty to follow my own inclinations, if I could separate myself from the inspection of men, I would undoubtedly live only for thee; thou alone, in fact, art worthy of our service; but thou knowest how severe the world is upon those who devote themselves to thee without reserve; and since I am obliged to live in the world, and am constrained to take part either with thee or with it, I have the weakness to walk in the paths that are offensive to thee, although I feel no satisfaction in opposing thy will; and I have not sufficient resolution to dare to offend the world, although my affections are alienated from it."

O man! exclaims St. Crysostom, dost thou comprehend the meaning of this language which thou holdest to God? Thou sayest, I consent, O Lord! to be anathematized by thee, provided I can but enjoy the approbation of the world; I would rather endure the eternal severities of thy justice, than forfeit the esteem and smiles of men. Such impiety as this, my beloved, must strike you with horror; and yet this is the crime of all those unhappy men who are withheld from their duty, or deterred from doing penance, by human respect.

This apprehension, or fear, is not only insulting to the majesty of God, but it is a secret, tacit denial of the truth of his promises. Our Lord has engaged to strengthen the weakness of his servants, and to protect them under the wings of his providence against the temptations of a vain world. To be deterred, therefore, from the service of God through fear, is to arraign the truth of this sacred promise, and to suppose that we shall be left to fight the battles of the Lord without receiving any aid or assistance from him; that we shall never be able by his grace to alter our opinion respecting the world; and that we shall always stand in awe of

its censures and ridicule, in the same degree as we do at the present moment. But, my beloved, how erroneous is this supposition! The man who has sincerely renounced the ways of sin, and returned to God with his whole heart, is strengthened from above: the only impression that is made on his mind by the derisions of worldlings is that of compassion: he pities their blindness, and prays for their conversion. He is anxious that they should know the truth, and not that they should approve of his conduct; that they should bless the name of the Lord, and not that they should lavish their applause on him; that they should embrace a virtuous life, and not that they should admire his example. He is more solicitous about their salvation than about their esteem; about the glory of the Lord, than about his own. "I covered my soul in fasting," says the royal prophet, "and it was made a reproach to me. And I made hair-cloth my garment; and I became a bye-word to them. They that sat in the gate spoke against me: and they that drank wine made me their song."—*Ps.*, lxviii, 11, 12, 13. But I was more affected at the sight of their blindness, than by their contempt, and I prayed to thee to have compassion on them, and to manifest the eternal truths of thy justice to them. "As for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord."—*Ps.*, lxviii, 14.

This is the impression that the derisions of the world would make on your minds, were you to enter seriously on the ways of virtue. But this is not all. In the commencement of a new life and of a true change of heart, the soul is unable to fix her attention on anything but God, and the horrors of her past life. Yes, the compunction which she feels at the moment is so lively, the working of divine grace is so powerful, and the heart is so inebriated, as it were, with the sensations of contrition and with the novelty of the holy pleasures of piety, that she is lost to every other feeling but that of joy for the possession of her God, and of grief for her past disloyalties to him.

O profane world! what influence can thy words possess over the soul that has renounced thee? what impression can the desires and censures of thy children make on the just man who is already exalted by faith above all things; who familiarly converses with God, as friend with friend; and who is indifferent to all that happens on earth? Like another Moses on the holy mountain, he seems to behold his God face to face: he enjoys the ineffable delights of his presence, and he is in a manner incapable of being moved by the calumnies and murmurs of those who are scattered below him on the plains. Ye just men who hear my words, come

forward, and declare whether I speak the truth or not. Relate the wonders of the Lord; describe the workings of divine grace in your souls when you first entered upon a new life, and convince the timid Christian that God may be loved to a degree far greater than the world can be feared.

But perhaps it will be asked, may not a person dedicate himself to the service of God in private, and keep up his relations with the world as usual. God looks only to the heart; and if that be faithful to him, is it not all that he requires? Why then give occasion to those satirical remarks which are usually made when a Christian is induced by repentance to depart from his former line of conduct? This argument it was that influenced the mind of the renowned Victorinus who was so celebrated in Rome for wisdom and eloquence, and caused him to continue in the open profession of idolatry, even after he was convinced of the truth of the Christian religion. "You know," says he to the first Simplicien, who was incessantly importuning him to embrace the faith, "you know that I am already a Christian." "I will not believe it," replied the zealous pastor, "neither will I ever reckon you in the number of the faithful, unless I behold you within the walls of the temple." "What!" replied the philosopher, "do the walls, then, make the Christian?" But, continues St. Augustine, who gave this account, God did not delay to enlighten his blindness. He became convinced of his error, and freely acknowledged that it was an act of impiety to blush at the open profession of the truth, and not to be in fear of openly professing, and systematically pursuing, what is known by all to be directly opposite.

There is, I allow, a deference that ought to be paid to the opinions of the world, but it is not on those occasions when it will be taken as an approval of the abuses and maxims of sinners. No, my beloved; were a Christian to take part with the world from a foolish fear of being looked upon as a disciple of Jesus and a true follower of his holy gospel, he would be less excusable, and would be guilty of a crime that is frequently attended with worse consequences, than if he were to take part with the impious at once. He would offer an insufferable insult to the majesty of God, by refusing him that public homage which is due to him from every creature. He would repay his benefits with ingratitude by turning his back on the grace which enlightened him to know his duties, and to discover the emptiness and vanity of earthly pleasures.

He would comport himself as if he was ashamed that God had made him a vessel of election, had chosen him out in

preference to the rest of sinners, and had opened to him the bosom of his clemency and love. He would act in a manner every way beneath his native dignity. He would debase the noble faculties of his soul, and would sacrifice honour and sincerity and candour and conscience at the shrine of dissimulation and hypocrisy.

In a word, he would scandalize his neighbour, and probably be the occasion of leading many into an error on a subject of the utmost importance; for the example of the man who attempts to associate God with the world is more pernicious in its consequences than the example of the avowed libertine. Indeed, the criminal excesses of the sinner more frequently meet with censure than applause, and are more apt to excite disgust in others, than to create a spirit of emulation. But the effect is very different that is caused by the example of the Christian who is regular and exact in the performance of his duties, and at the same time enters into the spirit of the world, engages in all its parties of pleasure, and sanctions its maxims and abuses. The more pious and exemplary the exterior deportment of such a person is, the deeper impression it makes on the minds of others, the more it is calculated to lead them astray, and induce them to suppose that the world is not so incompatible with the gospel as it is represented to be; that the Christian may serve two masters; and that he may have his consolation here in the enjoyments of flesh and blood without exposing himself to the danger of being deprived of his consolation hereafter. Thus it is that human respect, particularly in virtuous persons, is insulting to the majesty of God, and productive of the worst effects.

2. But why should we pay such a deference to the world? Are its censures or applauses of greater importance than our salvation? Does our misery or happiness in this world, or in the next, depend on them? Do not think it; they are of no importance whatever; and there cannot be a greater act of folly than to suffer ourselves to be deterred from our duty by the fear of what the world may think or say. For, in the first place, associate with whom you please in life, and study to cultivate their esteem and approbation with as much ardour and perseverance as it is possible, you never will succeed in gaining the good will of all. You will always be censured by some, however numerous your admirers may be in other respects. Whether you devote yourselves to the service of God, or continue in the ways of sin; whether you renounce the world, or whether you consult its favours; whether you be meek and humble, or whether you be passionate and haughty; your conduct will be arraigned by

many, and a most severe sentence will be passed against you. If, indeed, it could be effected that the suffrages of all should be united in your favour, then, perhaps, there might be some appearance of a rational excuse for regulating your conduct in a way that might best favour your purpose by securing their esteem. But this you will never find to be the case; men will never cordially unite together in their opinions. They are influenced chiefly by the passions; and the passions are things which do not operate upon all men uniformly alike.

Now, if it be certain that you will meet with censure from one quarter or another, whatever your conduct may be, why should you be deterred from the service of God through fear of it? You disregard the remarks and censures of men in the ordinary occurrences of life; why then should you be so solicitous to avoid them when you are labouring for eternal salvation? Let us even suppose that all mankind were to rise up against you and condemn your conduct, what harm would you experience from thence? Your hope, and trust, and delight would be in God alone; from him only would you seek your consolation, and in him only would you find it. Would it be with the view of pleasing the world that you endeavour to save your souls? Were you condemned by God could man save you—and were you to be justified by God could man condemn you? Oh! my beloved, dread the judgment of God alone, because he will pronounce upon your eternal lot; but as for man, listen not to any of his remarks on the merit or demerit of your conduct. What has either his applause or censure to do with your eternal welfare?

In fact, the censures of the world are generally, if not always, the recompense of virtue, and may be called the most indubitable proof of its sincerity. A piety that meets with the approbation of men is to be mistrusted. The world loves only his own; and when it lavishes its applauses on the piety of an individual, there is too much reason to fear that it is worldly in some respect or other, and open to the animadversions of the Supreme Judge. But if your are so happy as to be censured by it, then, on the part of God, I exhort you to fear nothing: "If you had been of the world," says our Lord, "the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."—*John*, xv, 19.

But, after all, how inconsistent it is to be influenced by the opinions of men! You acknowledge, by the very act of desiring to serve God, that you have been deceived by the world, and that you are now convinced that God ought to be

served in preference. If, then, you suffer yourselves to be held in bondage by the fear of its censures; do you not affix greater importance to its words than you know is due to the very thing that utters them—do you not despise the substance and fear the shadow—and what greater act of folly and inconsistency can there be than this?

Besides, is it not just that you should be deprived of the esteem of men? You enjoyed it at the time that you were not entitled to any esteem; at the time that you were the enemies of God, and worthy of his severest judgments: and is it not just that your much injured God should now take possession of his rights over you, and subject you to humiliation and reproach for having formerly made choice of the world before him?

Lastly, you did not fear the censures of men when you walked in the ways of sin: is it rational then to fear them when you walk in the paths of virtue? Ah! are you timid and ashamed when invited to give glory to the Lord of all? Is it for the man of virtue—the only character on earth that is truly noble—is it for a man of worth and excellence like this to skulk, and cringe, and stand abashed at the frowns and obloquy of an insulting world, when it is in the power of every miscreant that pleases to come forward with an unblushing countenance, in the face and in defiance of his fellow-mortals, and not only to despise their counsels and their judgment, but to silence their invectives, and even laugh them to scorn? And yet the world has seen this, and has seen it often. Impiety exulting in open daylight; and virtue and worth and true excellence retiring, confounded and abashed, from before the face of men.

My God! is it then a disgrace to serve thee, who givest life and motion and being to all creatures, and to whom alone belong power and glory and praise and thanksgiving? Is it dishonourable to confess that thou alone art great, adorable, and immortal? No, my beloved; let us not be deluded by such empty phantoms, such vain fears as these. It is an honour that the Lord allows us to serve him at all; and we cannot offer him a greater insult than by refusing to serve him through fear of creatures. Let us reflect on this; and if at any time we are urged by human respect to neglect our duties, let us fly the temptation with horror and disgust. Let us, like the grateful Samaritan, return to the Lord, and publicly give glory to him for every blessing that he bestows upon us. For it is thus only that we can make ourselves acceptable to him, and acquire a title to those never-ending blessings which he has reserved for us hereafter.

LIII.—FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

"Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh....The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty luxury."—*Gal.*, v, 16, 19.

The injunction which the apostle gives to the Galatians in the words of my text, induces me to address you on a subject which, if necessity did not require it, ought not so much as to be named among Christians. But in these days, when this detestable vice has extended its ravages over the whole Christian world, desolated the fair inheritance of Jesus, and pervaded the inmost recesses of that Church which had formerly banished it from its precincts, you will readily allow that it is the duty of the pastor to raise his voice, and openly to oppose its progress. I will therefore display before you the pernicious effects which it entails on its unhappy victims; I will show you that no vice removes the sinner to a greater distance from God; that no vice more completely closes every avenue to repentance; and that no vice makes the sinner more insupportable to himself, or more contemptible in the eyes of men.

Do thou purify my lips, O God; and in the description of the excesses of the voluptuous, inspire me with expressions which may leave untarnished the beauty of a virtue whose reign I hope to promote in their souls. Inspire me, I beseech thee; for the deeper the world is engulfed in the mire of this vice, the greater circumspection and delicacy does it demand of us when we dare to draw the veil and expose its filth.

1. The vice of impurity, in the first place, opens an immense abyss between the sinner and God—an abyss which, in all probability, will never again be closed up. In all other vicious habits there exists some point of union, some means of intercourse between the sinner and God; but the vice of impurity destroys every connection; it pollutes the body, it clouds the understanding, it creates a disgust for the exercises of piety, and removes the unhappy soul to an immense distance from everything that is good.

Yes, my beloved friends, it pollutes the body; it profanes the temple of God; it degrades the members of Jesus into slaves of uncleanness; it defiles a flesh which has been

nourished by the body and blood of the Son of God, and consecrated by the waters of baptism, which is destined to become immortal, and to partake of the spiritual properties which distinguished the body of Jesus after his resurrection; it defiles a flesh which will be deposited in the holy places, and which, mingling with the ashes of virgins and martyrs, will await under the altar of the Lamb the glorious day of his manifestation; it defiles a body which is more holy than this temple in which the glory of the Lord resides—more worthy to be possessed with honour than the vessels of the sanctuary which are consecrated by the tremendous mysteries they contain.

What an insurmountable barrier, then, does this ignominious vice oppose to the sinner's conversion! Can the God of sanctity, in whose sight the celestial spirits are unclean, banish far enough from him a flesh thus abused and defiled? His purity is such that he would be humbled by a communication with a creature that had preserved his original substance spotless and undefiled; and can the sinner expect that he will stoop so low as to hold a correspondence with dust and ashes that are defiled by the most execrable impurities?

In addition to this, it clouds the understanding, and renders the sinner incapable of making those salutary reflections which are the forerunners of a change of life. Men who before were prudent and enlightened, refuse to listen to the dictates of wisdom, reject the rules of discretion and justice, and, hurried away by the impetuous fury of their passion, are equally unmindful of what they owe to others, and of what they owe to themselves. Amnon, the son of David, dares to violate the purity of a sister, and loses both the crown and his life. The wife of Potiphar is enamoured of her slave Joseph, and, regardless of the distinction of her rank, of her conjugal duties, and of the consequences that may ensue, pursues her passion with the wildest fury. David commits adultery, and his intellectual faculties are immediately degraded: he is unmoved by the fidelity of Urias, and coolly delivers him up to the sword: he discontinues his harmonious praises of the law of the Lord, and is insensible of his ingratitude to a God who had raised him out of the dust, and exalted him to the throne of Juda. The two old judges, hurried away by their impure passion for the chaste Susanna, are not restrained either by the prudence which generally attends grey hairs, by the consideration of their venerable character, or by the exalted rank that they hold among their countrymen.

It, moreover, creates in the soul of its unhappy votary an

insuperable aversion to spiritual things, and a perfect indifference about everything that is good. The few faint desires of returning to God which from time to time shed their glimmering light on the mind, are overpowered and extinguished. The heart revolts at the idea of prayer, and shrinks back with horror at the sight of the difficulties and self-denials which obstruct the paths of piety and repentance. It can attend to nothing but to this odious passion: with this it is filled, possessed, infatuated. In society, in retirement, in the most serious employments, in the temple of God, and even at the very foot of the altar, the mind is fixed on its favourite passion: everything, says the apostle, is impure to him whose heart is impure.

Ah! my dear friends—you, I mean, who have been deceived by the allurements of this vice, look back on the days of innocence, call to mind the former sentiments of purity and virtue which were implanted in your nature; behold the immense journey you have travelled in the paths of iniquity since this fatal vice took possession of your souls, and be astonished at the distance you have wandered from your God.

2. Be astonished, I say, and tremble; for of all vicious habits, there is not one that so completely closes the avenues to repentance. The loss of grace, indeed, is caused by every mortal sin, but the vice of impurity dries up the fountain of heavenly blessings in its source. It tends to destroy the very foundations of a Christian life; it leads to apostacy and infidelity. This is proved by daily experience. The sharp stings of remorse, disquietude, and melancholy, with which it is attended, so powerfully urge the soul to seek relief at all hazards and at every expense, that she endeavours to eradicate her former principles: she calls them the prejudices of education; she doubts her own immortality. Dissolute at first through weakness, she wishes to be dissolute from principle; and she aspires to no higher enjoyments than the brutes—she seeks to convince herself that her end will be similar to theirs. Thus the passion that corrupted the heart in a short time undermines the sacred edifice of the faith.

This is not its only effect: it tends to destroy the virtues that make man amiable in society. Mildness, condescension, and affability, are changed into hastiness, dissimulation, and pride: serenity of mind, the sweet companion of innocence, is succeeded by gloomy melancholy and immoderate fits of joy: evenness of temper is replaced by humour and caprice: in a word, every quality that can either endear him to man,

or make him acceptable in the eyes of God, are expelled from the breast. Oh! how is the faithful city, exclaims the prophet, that was full of justice and truth, become a harlot? Justice dwelt in her, but now murderers. Thy silver is turned into dross; thy wine is mingled with water. (*Isa.*, i, 21, 22.)

Were I to enter minutely into a description of the loss both of health and fortune, which impurity occasions, the account would be affecting indeed. What was the primary cause of the decay of so many wealthy and noble families, which we have so frequently witnessed? Ah! could we investigate it, we should find that it owed to its origin to criminal excesses: could we trace the inscrutable ways of God, we should find that on account of this vice he severely chastised the transgressor, and continued his judgments on his children to the third and fourth generation, till at length the whole substance was taken away and given to others. You yourselves have probably witnessed its effects on individuals of the present day. You have seen the emaciated, the mutilated, the distempered countenance; you have seen the disordered frame; you have heard their complaints and their groans; you have seen them turn away with grief from the sweetest enjoyments of life, their souls been torn with remorse and melancholy, their bodies a prey to the most loathsome ulcers, and their countenances abashed by shame and confusion.

Ah! my God, thus dost thou chastise the sinner by means of his very passions; and thus dost thou forewarn him, by the universal decay both of his health and fortune, of the eternal torments which thou hast in store for those who delight in carnal pleasures.

3. I have already said that the vice of impurity makes the sinner insupportable to himself, and overwhelms the soul in the deep abyss of remorse and disquietude. I know, indeed, that remorse succeeds every vicious indulgence: but impurity has something in it so opposite to the excellency of reason, and to the dignity of our nature, that the sinner blushes at his weakness, and is ashamed of his inability to shake off the odious yoke. A lowness of spirits and an inward sorrow of mind incessantly torment him; a secret gnawing embitters every pleasure; the impure charm is gone as soon as possessed, but a sting is left behind. He would willingly avoid reflection, but reflection incessantly intrudes itself upon him. He envies the lot of the man who is hardened and thoughtless, but he cannot attain even to that dreadful state of tranquillity. He tries to summon up resolution sufficient to shake off the yoke of religion, but the attempt strikes a deeper horror into his mind than the vice itself.

If, indeed, the powers of his soul could be satisfied with the momentary enjoyment, were it only for a short time, he would be comparatively happy; but the impure passion is insatiable. One desire creates another, one gratification occasions another. It knows no bounds; the most impassioned excesses cannot satisfy its wishes; the most unbounded licentiousness still feels a deficiency. It cloys, but it does not fill. It dwells with complacency on desires which it knows it can never satisfy. This ardour of pursuit, and this inability of ever attaining its object, is painful, is insupportable. The wretched victim is inclined to envy the brute because he has no reflection to augment his desires; he even prefers his condition to that of man, because the brute can follow his instinct without obstacle and without remorse, and is restrained neither by honour nor by duty, by fear, nor by decency, but is guided and led by inclination alone.

Oh! how degrading to human nature is this desire! And nevertheless, degrading as it is, it is frequently embellished by the poetical fictions of the lascivious muse, and sacrilegiously admired and extolled by Christians who enjoy the honour of being members of the body of the Son of God. O my people, saith the Lord, who had inebriated you with this wine of fornication? Who hath converted my inheritance into a retreat for unclean spirits, and delivered up Jerusalem to the abominations of the Gentiles?

4. But, dear Christians, in vain has the world decked out this shameful passion with amorous epithets; in vain has a foolish and impious extravagance ennobled it by theatrical representations and delicacy of sentiments. It is acknowledged by all to be a vice of the lowest and meanest kind, equally dishonourable to the man and the Christian. In the whole catalogue of crimes, there is not one that resembles it. This, in no company where decency presides, is ever heard of. Its very name is a disgrace to the person who utters it. The crime itself is a foul blot upon the character and reputation of the wretch who perpetrates it, of whatever rank or condition in the world he may be, vilifying his nature, destroying the noblest faculties of his soul, and bringing down the man, with all the honours, and dignities, and titles that are about him, to a level with the lowest of all that is contemptible on earth. It is not my wish to exaggerate in the slightest degree the effects of this destructive passion. I know that I do not exaggerate, and I appeal with the fullest confidence to the consciences of these bad men for the proof of my assertion. I call upon the voluptuary to declare whether he would consent that publicity should be given to

all his failings, to all the indecencies, all the intrigues, and all the thoughts occasioned by this passion, and that they should be seen by men exactly as they are seen by God, and as they will be manifested at the last day? Would he stand up in defence of his actions, were that part of his life which is the most concealed, because the most shameful, proclaimed aloud from the housetop? No; the world—even the world, dissolute as it is, pays homage to chastity, and stigmatizes with the brand of infamy the individual who transgresses its amiable boundaries.

This, beloved friends, is a short description of the pernicious effects of a vice which was forbidden by the apostle Paul even to be named among Christians; and which, with greater reason, ought not to be the subject of discussion in the holy place, where the spotless Lamb is immolated, or from the Christian pulpit, from whence are announced the chaste law of the Lord, and the words of eternal life.

Ah! in those happy days when chastity was honoured with its martyrs—when Christian virgins preferred the most cruel death to the loss of this virtue—then the Christian churches resounded with the eulogies of chastity alone. The primitive pastors—the Cyprians, the Ambroses, the Augustines, exerted the powers of eloquence in extolling the excellence and advantages of virginity; and in their writings few invectives are to be found against the impure morals of their contemporaries, because few whose manners were so dissolute and tainted were to be found among them.

But now that this horrid vice has infected all ages, all sexes, all states and conditions in life; now that it has effaced the primitive features which distinguished our forefathers from the dissolute and corrupted idolaters; now that the universal licentiousness of the age is attempting to veil over its odious and disgraceful form, we are called upon by every consideration that can make the name and existence of virtue at all dear to us to raise our voice and without restraint to declaim against the horrid encroachment of a passion which, to the confusion of our common nature, is indulged and countenanced by all; we are called upon in the loudest manner and summoned to proclaim with the holy liberty with which our ministry is invested, that if any one defile or profane the temple of God, which is his own body, him in an evil hour will God destroy.

Would to God that this faint description might have its effect on all those of my present hearers who are under the tyranny of this fatal and execrable vice. Would to God that it could rouse them from their lethargy, and that in the

fervour of repentance I could hear them exclaim: I will arise; I will subdue this disgraceful passion; I will return to my father's house. I acknowledge that I am an ungrateful, rebellious, and unnatural son; but he is my Father, and will not reject me. I will throw myself at his feet; in the bitterness of my soul I will confess my unworthiness; I will say: Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee; I have sinned against Heaven by the public scandal of my life, and by my continual abuse of thy holy blessings; and I have sinned before thee. But how shall I recount the secret crimes and abominations which I indulged before thy eyes? The very idea of my past iniquities chills my veins; I cannot recount them. My God! I have repaid the love of the best of fathers by the rebellious ingratitude of the most unnatural of children.

My dear friends, were you to entertain and persevere in these sentiments, what heavenly consolations would flow into your souls! With what canticles of joy would the spirits above celebrate your conversion! O God of clemency! O God of compassion and forgiveness, lend thine ear to the earnest prayer of thy unworthy servant. Open the eyes of thy misguided creatures; infuse into their hearts the spirit of compunction; that so being recovered from the error of their ways, they may be admitted into the society of the chaste in the regions of pure and immaculate felicity.

LIV.—FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DEATH.

"And when Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city, behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."—*Luke*, vii, 12.

What an affecting spectacle, my beloved brethren, is presented before us in the gospel of this Sunday. An only son, the sole inheritor of the name, the titles, and the patrimony of his ancestors, is snatched away by an untimely death from the arms of a disconsolate and widowed parent, and hurried unexpectedly to the tomb in the very bloom of life. The perils of infancy had gone by; the labours of education had been completed; strength and reason had been brought to maturity; and the season of life had arrived which seemed to promise the greatest security against the fear of so melancholy a reverse. A multitude of his fellow-citizens mingle

their tears with those of his afflicted parent; they endeavour to pour the balm of consolation on her aching heart; they assemble round the bier; and solemnize the obsequies by their attendance and mourning. That an impression was made on their minds on this occasion of deep sorrow and regret, and that many wholesome reflections were to be heard on all sides on the vanity of human life and human expectations, there can be little doubt; but is it equally probable, that had the ceremony been conducted to its close as usual, and the body been deposited in the grave, the salutary, mournful reflections would have been of any long continuance? Would it have been an instructive lesson to them? Would it have caused them to be less attached to this transitory world—or rather, would not the remembrance of it have been obliterated from their minds almost as soon as the mournful ceremony had ended?

So it is, at least, with the greater part of mankind. The sentiments which a sudden death creates in our minds are but the sentiments of a few passing hours. We indulge reflections on the inconstancy of all human affairs: but no sooner is the object which occasioned them out of our sight, than our cares, solicitudes, our worldly attachments instantly regain their former ascendancy over us. Although perhaps we have just been witnessing the vain and perishable nature of all that is usually so promising on earth, in the sudden departure of birth, and fortune, and strength, and beauty, fading in the prime of life and dropping into the grave before our eyes, we returned to the world as much busied, and as much in earnest in the pursuit of those vain objects, the emptiness and uncertainty of which had been so affectingly displayed before us.

What is the reason, my friends, that the thoughts of death make such faint impressions on your minds? Is it not that the uncertainty of the time of its arrival gives us confidence, and induces us to suppose that it is at a great distance from us, and that we may take our rest for many years to come? If this has been our delusion, I will endeavour to dispel the fatal charm, and convince you from the imminent danger that continually hangs over us, and is seen to threaten us on every side, of the strict and urgent necessity there is of our being constantly on the watch, and in a state of continual preparation.

1. The first step which we took in life led directly towards the grave. No sooner were our eyes open to the light, than the sentence of death was passed upon us: and, as if existence were a crime, we no sooner began to enjoy it, than we

were judged worthy of death. This was not our original destiny. We were formed for immortality: but no sooner did sin enter into the world, than death followed in its train, and by the justice of God was authorized to claim the whole created universe as his devoted prey.

Thus were we all consigned into the hands of death: we imbibed from the bowels of our parent a slow poison, which causes us to languish here below, some for a shorter, and some for a longer period, but which always has its effect at last, and ends in death: we die daily: every instant deprives us of a portion of our lives, and thrusts us on towards the grave. In such a situation as this, what consideration is there that ought to be so familiar to us as the thought of death? He who is condemned to die, sees in every object that presents itself something to remind him of his approaching fate; and, is the continuance here, whether of a shorter or a longer date, of such mighty importance to us, as to induce us to banish from our thoughts all idea and recollection of the sentence, sure and irreversible, that has been passed upon us?

It is true, indeed, that all men have not the same appointed period for their departure hence. The age of some is extended to an advanced period: and these, like the ancient patriarchs, die full of days in the arms of a numerous posterity. Others are arrested in their mid career, and, like the king of Juda, behold the gates of death ready to close upon them in the midst of their days. Others appear on the earth, and sink immediately into the grave: like the flowers of the field, they expand, wither, and decay. The fatal moment appointed for each one to die, is a secret written in the eternal books, which the Lamb only is entitled to open. The number of our years, therefore, is hidden from us: we live in a state of dreadful incertitude: and this incertitude, instead of striking terror into our souls, banishes the recollection of it from our minds; we fear not, because the object which ought to excite our fears, is concealed from our view.

But, my beloved, of all dispositions this is the most irrational and inconsiderate. Is that misfortune, which may fall upon us every instant, less to be dreaded than the one which threatens only after a certain number of years? Our souls may this night be demanded of us: and is that a sufficient reason to induce us to live on in a state of as perfect tranquillity as if they would never be called for? The danger is always hanging over our heads: and ought we to pay no attention to it on that very account? It is not in this manner that we act in affairs that are of far less consequence than

that of salvation: incertitude is a spur to activity and vigilance: and never is it adduced as a motive for sloth and torpid indifference?

Ah! had the hour of dissolution been manifested to us; had the number of our years, and the fatal moment of their close, been inscribed on our foreheads at our birth, with what disquietude, with what alarm should we have looked forward to the destined period! How short would the time have appeared! How unceasingly would the thought have intruded itself into our minds! What a check would it have imposed on our passions and lusts! How carefully should we have put every instant to profit, and prepared ourselves for the awful trial which awaited us! And is it possible that rational beings, whose fears would be excited by the foreknowledge of the hour of death, can live on in a state of thoughtless indifference, now that the knowledge of it is concealed from them—now that they are in the greatest uncertainty whether death will not surprise them on a sudden when they least expect it? Is it possible that rational beings can be eager in the pursuit of vanity and folly, when this uncertainty exposes them to the danger every instant of being cut off in the midst of their sins, and summoned to give an account of their stewardship.

Suffer not yourselves, my brethren, to be deluded on a subject of this importance. The uncertainty of death is attended with every circumstance that is calculated to terrify and alarm the mind of a thinking and prudent man. In the first place, to be surprised by death is not an uncommon occurrence; nor is it a misfortune that happens only to a few ill-fated individuals, and for that reason more to be despised than dreaded: no: it is an occurrence that happens daily and hourly. Very few there are who are not cut off sooner than they expected. It was thus probably that your relations, your friends, your acquaintances were hurried into the grave. You were grieved and astonished at their premature decease, and perhaps attributed it to accident, to the inexperience or imprudence of the physician, or to other causes; but the true and only cause was, that the day of the Lord is generally sudden and unexpected. The earth is like an immense field of battle, on which we are constantly engaged with the enemy. You have fortunately escaped hitherto; but you have seen many fall on every side, who expected to escape as well as yourself: to-morrow you will be engaged again; and have you any security that death, who is so capricious in the choice of his victims, will still favour you? Sooner or later you must inevitably fall; and it may be to-morrow as

well as any other day: and is it prudent, is it rational to attempt to build a solid and permanent abode on the very spot which, perhaps, is destined to be your grave? Whatever your situation in life may be, there is not an instant but may be your last: not an action can be performed, not a movement can be made, that may not hurry you precipitately to the grave: every day that you devote to festivity and mirth may be succeeded by the day of final retribution: every time that your eyes are closed in sleep, they may be closed for ever: every crime that you commit may fill up the measure of your iniquities: every fit of illness may be the cause of your dissolution; the most trifling infirmities frequently baffle the experience of the most skilful physicians, become dangerous on a sudden, and end in death. All this you know: all this you acknowledge: and yet this alarming declaration is a mere expression, a form of words, which neither makes an impression on your minds, nor causes you to take a single precaution to secure yourselves against the danger of a surprise.

In the second place, if uncertainty were only as to the hour and the manner in which we may be carried off, there would not be such pressing motives for alarm: for it is of little consequence to the Christian where or how he dies, provided he die in the state of grace. But the uncertainty extends to this likewise. You are uncertain whether you will die in the Lord or in your sins: you know not what will be your condition in that land where is no change nor shadow of alteration: you know not into what hands your poor, deserted, trembling souls will fall, after they have quitted the body: whether they will be environed with light, and transported on the wings of angels into the mansions of the blessed, or enveloped in a cloud of darkness, and hurried headlong into the deep abyss. You are placed between these two extremities, and which of them will be your portion death alone can determine.

What a dreadful uncertainty is this! and yet you are not alarmed! You take as little notice of the approaches of death as if you had no interests at stake. Ah! on the supposition even that all was to end with our mortal existence, the unbeliever would have no reason to say: "Let us not think of our last hour; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." No: the sentence would give him no consolation: for the more he was attached to life, the greater reason would he have to fear death, which, in his opinion, would hurl him again into his original nothing, and blot him out of the creation. But you, my beloved, you behold in the light of faith

punishments and rewards eternal beyond the grave: and can there be a greater act of folly, a greater act of madness, placed as you are in a state of the most alarming incertitude, than to live on as if you had actually adopted the sentiments of the unbeliever, and as if your only solicitude was to enjoy as much of the good things of this world as possible before the fatal moment arrived? Were you truly wise, were you sincerely desirous of securing your eternal happiness, you would have the thoughts of death continually present to your minds, and you would endeavour by works of piety to guard against a surprise, the consequences of which would be irreparable.

Thirdly, incertitude in all other occurrences of life is attended with many consoling circumstances: for either the danger is diminished on account of the numbers that are exposed to it, or a hope may be entertained that resources equal to the exigencies may be discovered in the time of need; or, if all should fail, that experience will be a useful lesson, and be the means of preventing the like misfortune in future. But the uncertainty of death is attended with no consoling circumstance. The danger is not diminished by the numbers that are exposed to it: the resources that are offered on the bed of sickness are generally ineffectual; and the experience which is gained by a failure is of no avail.

On what pretence, therefore, can you justify this total. this inexplicable forgetfulness of your last hour? Is it because the vigour of youth seems to promise many years of enjoyment? But what can be more fallacious? Is youth secure from the attacks of death? No; the son of the widow of Naim was young and he was cut off. Youth is the time of the greatest danger, and the victims of death at that stage of life are more numerous than in any other.

Do you rely upon the strength of your constitution? But what is health even in its best state? Alas! it is no more than a spark which may be extinguished by the slightest blast: one day of severe illness is sufficient to break down the most vigorous frame. But who are you who boast of this strength of constitution; do you boast of it when you are summoned to perform the works of mortification and penance?

However, without inquiring whether your constitution is strong or weak; whether or not it has been injured by the follies and indiscretions of youth; whether you perceive in your frame any habitual complaints, any secret weaknesses, any signs of mortality, or not; I will suppose that your years will be lengthened out beyond your utmost expectation; and,

after all, what would be the span of your existence? Nothing is long that will have an end. Look behind you: what is become of the years that are past? They are flown; they have left nothing behind them but a faint remembrance; they are like the dream of the night; it is as if you dreamt that you had lived so long. This is all that remains. The whole space that has intervened between your birth and the present hour has passed by like an arrow, and its trace is not to be found. Recal to mind the great events that happened in your time — the revolutions of empires — the wars — the battles—the victories—the ruin and devastation of provinces and kingdoms: they now seem to have succeeded each other with rapidity like the acts and scenes of a tragedy: the recollection of them is like a dream.

What will be the few days you have yet to live? Will they prove, do you think, more substantial than those that are past? Years appear long in the prospective view; but no sooner are they commenced than they are ended; they seem to vanish in an instant. Reflect for a moment on the state of things such as they were in your younger years, and examine the changes that have taken place. New scenes have appeared; new personages have arisen on the stage; new subjects call forth either your censures, your praises, or your derisions; a new world has insensibly stolen upon you before you perceive the wreck of the former one: all things press forward with you, and like you; a torrent which nothing can resist sweeps all before it into the vast gulf of eternity: our forefathers traced the way for us yesterday, and to-morrow we shall do the same for those who are to come after us. The face of the universe changes incessantly: the living take possession of the spoils of the dead, and in the next instant step into the same grave.

Nothing is permanent on earth. God alone remains always the same. The torrent of time, which sweeps away each succeeding generation, rolls at his feet; and with indignation he beholds those weak mortals, who, borne down by the rapidity of its course insult him as they pass by, place their whole happiness in the enjoyment of that single instant, and with unconcern fall into the hands of his justice. Oh, where are the wise amongst as? says the apostle. Would not that sacred name be prostituted were we to bestow it on the man who forgets what he is, and what he will soon be, although perhaps, in other respects, he may be capable of governing the universe?

And yet, my beloved, what impression does the instability of human things make on our minds? What effect has been

produced by the death of your friends, of your relations, and of your acquaintance? You grieved for a short time; and then you hastened to take possession of their spoils, without once reflecting that the same fate awaited yourselves. You resemble the foolish soldier, who, in the heat of battle, at the moment when his companions are falling on every side, seizes eagerly the spoils of the slain, and is no sooner clothed with them than a mortal blow deprives him of his new-acquired ornaments and his life.

Thus the son closes the eyes of his father, performs his funeral obsequies, enters into possession of his wealth and property, and returns more busied, more delighted with his new acquirements than affected by the exhortations of a dying parent, or convinced of the vanity of all created things by the sight of a spectacle which reminded him of his own nothingness, and announced to him the instability of his own mortal existence. So far from being alarmed for his own safety by the example of those who are cut off before his eyes, he becomes more attached to the world than before, and begins to form plans and devise projects with as great eagerness as if he was to continue in possession for ever.

O my beloved friends! make use of your reason; do not blindfold yourselves; but consider calmly and deliberately the reflections which common sense alone will suggest on the uncertainty of death.

First, since there is not a year, not a day, not an hour, but may prove your last, it is folly to attach yourselves to that which, perhaps, you will possess only for an instant, and to lose the only good which you might possess for ever.

Secondly, since the hour of death is uncertain, you ought to die daily; that is, you ought to live as if your were immediately to die—to perform all your actions with as great perfection as if you were immediately to appear before the great tribunal; and, since the future time is not at your disposal, to husband the present in such a manner as not to need the future to make reparation for it.

Lastly, since the hour of death is uncertain, you ought not to defer your repentance. If you had unknowingly swallowed a deadly poison, would you defer the remedy which ought to be taken immediately as the only means of preventing its deleterious effects? This is precisely your case. Take your precautions, then, immediately. You have death within you; for sin is death. Apply the remedy instantly. The present moment is everything to him who is not certain of the next: the poison that has infected your souls must soon operate: the goodness of God is ready to administer relief:

make haste, therefore; apply to him for it ere it be too late. Let it not be said that exhortations are necessary to influence or determine you in a case like this. Is it necessary to exhort the wretched mariner in the midst of a storm to exert his utmost efforts to avoid the shipwreck which threatens him? Your last hour is at hand: in the twinkling of an eye you will be summoned before the judgment-seat of God: the few moments you have yet to live may be profitably employed: the greater number of those whom you see drop into the grave suffered them to escape; and will you imitate their folly? If so, you will be surprised by death in the same manner as they were; you will die like them, before you have begun to live well. The ministers of God admonished them of their danger, and they would not take the alarm; we admonish you; and if you imitate their imprudence, what reason can there be for supposing that you will not at some future unhappy moment share in their misfortune?

These, my beloved, are the reflections which the uncertainty of death ought to excite in your souls. Give them your serious consideration, for your salvation is at stake. Beg of God that he would pour forth his Holy Spirit on you, and dispel the shades of darkness in which you are sitting; that he would convince you of the dangers of your state, and give you grace so to live as to be constantly in readiness to obey his summons, and appear before him.

LV.—SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DEATH.

"When Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city [of Naim], behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."—*Luke*, vii, 12. (*Read from the gospel of last Sunday.*)

From this gospel I took occasion, last Sunday, to inculcate the necessity of being always prepared for death, on account of the uncertainty of the time of its approach. We will now, if you please, consider the certainty of death, and prove the necessity of making it the frequent subject of your thoughts and of banishing far from you that sadness and melancholy which the recollection of it too often instils into the minds of men.

Man does not love to reflect on his own inanity. The recollection of his last end humbles his pride, calls forth his love of life, strikes at the root of his passions, and over-

whelms his mind with uneasiness and melancholy. To die—to be snatched away from the enjoyment of all created things—to enter the unexplored abyss of eternity—to become a corpse—the food of worms—a loathsome and frightful object to all mankind—a hideous inhabitant of the grave; the very thought of these things makes us shudder with affright, chills our blood, and embitters every pleasure of life. We cannot fix our imaginations steadfastly on the dismal spectacle that presents itself before us: we recoil from it with horror, we fly from every thing that reminds us of it: we carry our fears to an excess sometimes bordering on superstition: we imagine that we see death on every side of us, and for that reason we endeavour to conceal it always from our sight.

Such fears would be excusable in the heathen who knows not God; because he considers death as the greatest of all calamities, and can expect nothing beyond the grave; and as he lives without hope, so he must die without consolation. But that death should appear so terrible to the Christian—the child of the promises, and that this dread of its approach should be an inducement to him to banish it from his thoughts, is at once astonishing and inexcusable.

For, my beloved, although it be natural and reasonable that you should stand in fear of death, yet, since it is certain that death will sooner or later be your portion, I cannot conceive why this fear and dread should be considered as a sufficient reason for not making it the subject of your thoughts in order to be prepared for it. On the contrary, reason seems to dictate that the more serious the evil is with which you are threatened, the more necessary it is that you should not lose sight of it, and that you should adopt every precaution that would guard you against a surprise.

What! shall it be said, that the more you are terrified and alarmed, the more indolent and careless you are: or, that the excess of your fears has banished from your mind that salutary fear which is the beginning of wisdom, and which will cause you to fear nothing, nor even to think of the object that affrights you? Where is the man who is tranquillized and encouraged by too lively a sense of danger? Were you walking in a narrow and rugged path, with a precipice on each side, would you place a bandage over your eyes, that you might not behold the danger, and that your head might not be turned by the view of the deep abyss into which you are likely to fall?

Ah! my brethren, the grave is open under your feet: you know it; you are terrified; and will you, instead of taking

the precautions which religion provides to prevent you from falling into it unprepared and unawares, will you cover your eyes, and indulge in every festive amusement, in order to efface the terrifying idea from your minds? will you, in imitation of certain wretched victims of the pagan worship, run to the pile that is prepared for you, blindfold, covered with flowers, and surrounded by the votaries of mirth and jollity, on purpose that you might not reflect on the fatal term to which the procession is hastening, and that you may not behold the altar—that is, the bed of death, on which you are speedily to be immolated?

If it were possible that you could retard the approach of death by banishing it from your thoughts, your fears would be excusable. But, whether you think on it or not, death is always advancing towards you, and it will most undoubtedly arrive at the appointed time. What advantage is it, therefore, to fly from the reflection? Will this diminish the danger? No, it will increase it: you will be more in danger of being taken by surprise. Do you diminish the horrors of death by concealing it from your view? Ah! the sting of death is not to be blunted by such a procedure. Were you to familiarize yourselves with the thought, your weak and timid minds would become habituated to it; by degrees you would be enabled to look steadfastly on it, and to meet it without fear, or at least to meet it with resignation and peace of mind. Danger that is long foreseen does not create astonishment: death is formidable only when it is concealed from the sight; it is only to be dreaded when it comes unexpected.

But supposing that the frequent recollection of your last hour were to cause sensations of fear and sadness in your minds, would any serious consequence ensue? "Such gloomy, melancholy thoughts," you say, "might bring on despondency, and in the end, perhaps, might wholly deprive you of your reason." Vain pretext! Have you never reflected that there have been immense multitudes of faithful souls, who seasoned every action with the thoughts of death; who discovered in that awful meditation the most powerful means of restraining their passions, and the most urgent motives to fervour and perseverance; that there have been hosts of illustrious penitents, who may be said in a manner to have buried themselves alive, that their minds might be occupied with no other subject; and that there have been innumerable saints, who, like the apostle, died daily, to the end that they might not die eternally? And did these gloomy, melancholy thoughts deprive them of their reason?

They undoubtedly were of opinion that this world was no other than a place of banishment; that the riches and pleasures of this life were not more substantial than a dream; and that salvation was their great and only business: but was this the privation of reason? Happy folly! I might exclaim: why are not we of the number of these wise fools?

But what is that reason of which you would be deprived? You would be deprived of that carnal, haughty, corrupted reason which induces you to favour the passions, to prefer the shadow before the substance, to love vanity rather than wisdom, and to seek your consolation here rather than hereafter. But as for that wise, that Christian maxim, that prudence of the serpent, that wisdom which elevates the soul far above all sublunary things, it is acquired only by continually meditating on our last end.

"If you were to pursue this method," you add, "it would be sufficient to make you dissolve every connection, quit every pursuit, and drive you into extremes." My beloved brethren, it would cause you to renounce the world, to fight against your irregular inclinations, to recover from your spiritual disorders, and to lead a chaste, regular, and Christian life. This is the effect that it would produce; and this is what the world calls extremes. At all events, do not be afraid of being hurried by your fervour beyond the bounds of prudence: you will never offend on that side. You are little acquainted with your own nature, with the obstacles which flesh and blood will throw before you, if you apprehend that you will be guilty of indiscretion in your progress towards Christian perfection. Only begin: your first fervour will soon cool: tepidity and indifference are the only rocks that you have to fear: take your precautions to escape these, and advance boldly and resolutely. But suffer not yourselves to be so grossly imposed upon as to be induced to neglect the service of God from a fear of serving him too faithfully. It is not thus that you act in your temporal concerns. Be consistent: you acknowledge you cannot do too much for the acquisition of the things of this world—acknowledge, then, with the same candour, that you cannot do too much for the acquisition of the good things of eternity.

2. Moreover, by banishing from your minds the thoughts of death, on account of the gloomy ideas which they excite, you are guilty of ingratitude to God, and reject a blessing which he intended should contribute to your sanctification. How many are there who affect to despise death, who pride themselves on their indifference about its approach, and who consider it as nothing more than the annihilation of their

existence. How many Christians even are there, of learning and abilities, who employ their thoughts during life in hardening themselves into constancy and serenity of mind at their last hour; a conduct as disgraceful to reason as the most abject timidity: how many who are so impressed with the false ideas of honour and courage, as to rush precipitately to combat in the face of the most imminent danger, without once reflecting on the fate that probably hangs over them; how many, who from a turn of mind too light and trivial to admit of the least consideration, pass their whole lives without once deliberately reflecting that they are to die! It is, therefore, a singular mercy that God has given these thoughts such an ascendency over your minds: it is, undoubtedly, by the means of them that he wishes to draw you to himself. You little reflect what it is that you hazard, when you endeavour to dispel the salutary fears which seem to overwhelm you: you, perhaps, are rejecting the only means that can facilitate your return to God: it seems as if you were angry with your Benefactor for the benefits he is pleased to confer upon you, and as if there were something to reproach yourself with in your inability to get rid of it.

Oh! tremble lest the gift should be withheld from you, and your hearts should be hardened. The gift that is not only despised, but rejected as an evil, is quickly succeeded by the indignation, or, at least, the displeasure of the Giver. If he should impart to you that much desired tranquillity at the sight of death, the solemn obsequies of a funeral would then no longer throw a gloom over your spirits, or interrupt your pleasures; you would then be able to fix your eyes on a corpse and on the criminal object of your meretricious affections alternately; and you might secretly applaud yourselves for the courage and consolation with which you conquered your former fears and alarms.

But, my beloved, what a state would this be for a Christian who has no other important business than to prepare himself for eternity! Endeavour, therefore, to reap the advantage of this sensibility while it is in your power. Collect around you the objects that are calculated to remind you of death, now that they are capable of disturbing the peaceful reign of your passions. Walk over the tombs of your relatives and friends, and meditate on the vanity of all things here below; question their departed souls, and ask what are the fruits which they reap in the darksome land of death from all their former pleasures and riches; open in spirit their graves, and see to what a state their bodies—their former dear companions and their idols—are now reduced. Oh! the sight is too shocking

to look upon—a mass of worms and corruption. Such as they are, you yourselves will quickly be. Imagine for a moment that you are stretched on the bed of sorrow, struggling in the pangs of death; that your members are benumbed and seized with a mortal chill; that your tongue is motionless; your eyes fixed, and covered with a confused dimness; that your friends and relatives are assembled round you, offering up their unavailing supplications for your recovery, and redoubling your sorrows and fears by their tender sighs and by their floods of tears; that the minister of the Lord is by your side, holding in his hand the sacred emblem of your redemption, now your only refuge, and speaking to you words of faith, of hope, and of contrition. Let your imagination dwell on this instructive, this interesting meditation; contemplate yourselves agonizing in the pangs of this last conflict, and giving no other signs of life than the convulsions which announce your approaching dissolution; the whole world is fled from you: honours, and riches, and pleasures are gone for ever; you are accompanied by your works, and on the point of appearing before the dread tribunal of the Deity.

My beloved, this is not an illusory description of your future state; it is the history of all those who die before your eyes daily, and it will shortly be applicable to you. Call to mind, then, this awful moment; it will arrive, and that perhaps in a short time—instantly, perhaps. At all events, it is certain that it will arrive; and the only consolation you can then receive must arise from having made your whole lives a study and preparation for a good death.

3. Were we to examine more minutely into the cause of these excessive fears, we should probably discover that they originate, for the most part, in the terrors of a guilty conscience. In general, it is not death that is feared; it is the justice of God beyond the grave; it is the dread of a miserable eternity. Purify your souls, therefore; expiate your past offences; admit God into your hearts; avoid everything that can expose you to his anger and indignation; put yourselves in such a state as to be able to look forward with confidence to his mercies after death. Then you will behold the approach of your last hour with less disquietude and alarm; and the sacrifice of the world and of your passions, which you have already made, will enable you to offer him the sacrifice of your life with placid resignation and joy whenever he shall be pleased to call for it.

For, my brethren, what is there in death that can dismay the just man? From what will it separate him? From a

world which he has renounced, which will be destroyed, and of which none but the wicked will be enamoured: from riches, which he does not covet, which are not possessed without danger, and cannot impart felicity: from his family and friends, who will quickly follow him: from his body, which has been his domestic enemy, which he has been necessitated to chastise, and to keep in strict subjection. And what will death give him in return for these losses? It will put him in possession of unchangeable blessings, which no one can take from him—of ineffable pleasure, which he will enjoy without fear or disquietude—of God himself, whom we will possess for all eternity: it will deliver him from his passions; it will settle in his soul an unalterable peace; and it will unite him to the society of the happy and just in the kingdom of Heaven. To such a soul death is a triumph and a gain.

In fact, death is the only cheering prospect, the only hope that consoles the just man during the time of his pilgrimage on earth. If he be visited with afflictions, he knows that his last hour is at hand; that the short and transitory tribulations of this life will be succeeded by an eternal weight of glory; and the thought of this inspires him with patience, courage, and joy. If he be fainting under the yoke of Jesus, and, as it were, yielding under the pressure of the multiplied duties of the gospel, he considers that the day of the Lord is approaching, that his eternal reward is nearly within his reach; and thus he is invigorated with renewed strength, and enabled to walk on with alacrity and speed. Dearly beloved, said the apostle to the first Christians, the time is short, the day is at hand, the Lord is nigh. Rejoice, therefore: I say unto you again, rejoice. This was the consolation of these persecuted, injured, proscribed men, who were trodden under foot, and treated as the outcasts of mankind, who were a parable of reproach to the Jews, and a scorn to the Gentiles. They knew that their tears would be wiped away in death, and that mourning, and grief, and pain, would then be no more: they knew this, and their sufferings were alleviated and sweetened by the thought of it. Ah! if an angel from Heaven had appeared to these generous confessors of the faith, and assured them that the Lord had exempted them from death, and given them immortality upon earth, their faith would have been weakened, and their constancy exposed to the severest trials: they would have lost their only hope and consolation.

Perhaps you see nothing remarkable in this conduct, because you imagine that death must appear desirable to

men labouring under such accumulated miseries and afflictions. But you mistake the cause of their sorrows. They grieved and mourned, not on account of persecutions and sufferings, for these were their joy and consolation, and they gloried, like the apostle, in tribulations; but they grieved and mourned on account of their distance from their beloved Jesus: this was the cause of their tears: this it was that made death desirable. While we are in the body, says St. Paul, we are absent from the Lord.

Piety consists in ardent desires of being reunited to Jesus our head, in longing for that happy moment when we shall be incorporated with the elect in that mystical body which has been formed from the beginning of the world out of every tribe, and tongue, and nation. During our abode on earth we are like branches separated from the tree—like strangers wandering in a foreign land—like captives in confinement waiting impatiently for their deliverance—like children banished for a time from their father's house—like members separated from the body. Now that our Lord is ascended into Heaven, it is there alone that we can have our consolation; there alone is our true country; and thither we must hasten as to the place of enjoyment and rest.

To the just man, my beloved, death is a most desirable object. When his last hour is arrived, he shuts his eyes without regret to a world which he has always despised; he takes his last farewell with joy of all that is earthly and mortal; he leaves nothing behind him that he regrets the loss of. If he be taken away in the midst of his days he does not repine; or rather, he pours forth his soul in acts of thanksgiving to his Deliverer who thus abridges his time of trial, who exacts only half of the debt as the price of his salvation, and consummates his sacrifice in a short time, lest his heart should be seduced by a longer residence in the midst of a corrupt world. His self-denials and austerities, which at the time were so painful to flesh and blood, are now his sweetest consolation. Every thing vanishes from his sight except what he has done for God. His riches, his honours, his friends and relatives, all forsake him, all but his works; they indeed remain, and they console him. Oh! how is he transported with joy at the thought that he never placed his trust in man, but that his whole confidence was in the Lord, who alone continues for ever, and in whose embraces he will quickly experience that felicity and peace which the world with all that it possesses could never impart. Thus, unconcerned about the past, despising what is present, and delighted with the thoughts of what is to come; beholding, as it were, the

bosom of Abraham open to receive him, and the Son of Man seated at the right hand of his Father, holding in his hand the crown of immortality, he sleeps in the Lord; he is carried by angels to the mansions of the blessed, and he returns to the place from whence he came. Oh! may we die the death of the saints; and may our last end be like unto theirs.

LVI.—SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE OBLIGATION INCUMBENT ON ALL OF LEADING A HOLY LIFE.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."—*Matt.*, xxii, 37.

This, my brethren, is the great commandment of the law: on this foundation the whole edifice of Christian piety must be raised. No virtue, no good work can be deserving of an eternal reward unless it be seasoned with love. Necessary as is the observance of this precept, there is not one that is less practised. When we assert that it is incumbent on every Christian, in whatever state of life he may be, to love God with his whole heart, that is to say, to fix his whole heart and affections on God, to consult his glory in all things, to love no creature, not even himself, his friend, his wife or children, to his prejudice; to be ready to make every sacrifice rather than offend him; to employ all the powers of his mind on him, and not to suffer the cares and solicitudes, the delights and pleasures of this world, to avert his thoughts from him; to exert his whole strength in his service, and to embrace every means, however laborious, of increasing this love of God in his soul; when, I say, we declare that it is incumbent on every Christian to love and serve God in this manner, and that there is no true piety without it, we are told that such morality cannot be practised in the world, and that we require too much. This is the answer we receive, and these are the pretexts by which too many who call themselves Christians, endeavour to justify the irregularities of their conduct. I have no doubt but a little insight into the merit of these pretexts will convince you how little, against the positive injunctions of God, all such reasoning as this is to be depended upon.

It is said, in the first place, that people in the world must live like the world; that, were they to consult only the glory

of God, and make him the chief object of their desires and thoughts, they would neglect the relative duties which they owe to themselves and families; that we condemn the world without being acquainted with it; that the mode of conduct we prescribe borders on ridiculous singularity; that every individual must save his soul by being conformed to the state in which he is placed; and that it is not consonant with reason to exact the same rigorous attention to the service of God from the man who is engaged in business or in public life, as from him who is totally dedicated to the duties of religion.

In answer to this specious mode of reasoning, I must beg you to observe that the duties and obligations which we lie under in consequence of our belief in the gospel of Jesus, and of which we shall have to render an account to God, are of two kinds: those, for instance, which belong to the separate states and conditions of men, such as the duties of a pastor, a magistrate, a subject, a parent, a servant, etc.; and those which are inseparable from our baptism, and which are essentially requisite to all who have been regenerated in Jesus Christ, without distinction of potentate or subject, master or servant, men of the world or those who have abandoned it.

Now, my brethren, I ask, are you Christians in one state, and not in another? Have we not all the same gospel, the same hope? Are we not all members of the mystical body of Jesus, disciples of the cross, and strangers on earth? Can the duties of any state annul the essential duties of religion? Did our Lord deliver one gospel to the world, and another to the recluse? Or, in the gospel which he did deliver, are there are exceptions in favour of the world—any special immunity, any protecting clause, anything, in short, to show that the severity of its maxims was not intended for it? He, indeed, declared that the world would oppose these holy maxims, and that it should be judged by them. If, therefore, it is to be judged by the gospel, the gospel is its law; and it certainly would not be condemned on account of any opposition to its maxims, if these maxims were not strictly obligatory.

Never pretend, therefore, to justify yourselves by saying that you live in the midst of the world. Magdalen did the same, and yet she did not pretend to be exempt from the obligation of doing penance, and devoting the remainder of her days to the service of God. David was in the world, and even on a throne, and yet he did not suppose this a sufficient reason to induce him to moderate the excess of his grief, and to abate the rigour of his austerities. Esther, Judith,

our pious king and confessor Edward, and the illustrious Margaret of Scotland, were of the world, and lived in the midst of its splendours; and yet they did not imagine that they were authorized to be worldly-minded, sensual, indecorous in their dress, dissolute in their morals, and lovers of all the loose and fashionable amusements of the age, or at liberty in the slightest manner to infringe upon any, even the minutest principles of the gospel.

2. My brethren, whence arose the distinction in the Church of God between those who are of the world and those who are not? It originated in the corruption of morals and in the decay of piety. In the first ages there was no such distinction: all—all equally renounced the world. The ministers of the altar, the holy confessors, the chaste virgins, the faithful matrons, the whole body of Christians, even they who were of the *household of Cæsar*, separated themselves in affection from, and had nothing in common with the world: they knew that the world was adverse to the gospel, and they considered that it was of equal import to be a Christian, and renounce the world. If you are of the world, it is your misfortune, and not a justification of your conduct.

Besides, what is it you pretend to claim when you say that you are of the world? That you are not obligated to submit to so rigorous a course of penance as others are? If the world were the seat of innocence, the asylum of virtue, the refuge of purity, holiness, and temperance, you would have some reason on your side. Or, do you pretend that prayer is less necessary? If the world were not so replete with danger as solitude; if temptations were not so violent, nor seduction so common; and if less grace was required in it for the attainment of Christian perfection, your plea might be admitted. Or, do you suppose that temporary retirement is not necessary in the world? If the conversations in which you engage were more pious, and the society more innocent; if everything that you saw and heard tended to elevate your minds to God, to strengthen your faith, excite your fervour, and contribute to your advancement towards perfection, your reasoning would be just. Or, do you imagine that it requires less labour to merit Heaven in the world than in retirement? Ah! if you had fewer passions to resist, or fewer obstacles to surmount; if you were encouraged by the example of the world to be obedient to the gospel, to be humble, to forgive injuries, to despise vanity, to be resigned in affliction and cheerful in suffering, then you might come forward with confidence, and justify yourselves. But nothing of all this is the truth. The world is the very reverse in every respect; and

consequently, instead of being exempted from any of the gospel duties by living in the world, you are thereby constrained to fulfil them with more exactness and greater fervour.

3. But you say that some distinction must nevertheless be made, and that greater perfection must be required in the cloistered recluse than in the man of the world. I readily admit a distinction must be made; but it is not in favour of that side which you imagine. The measure of piety that is requisite for each one is proportionate to the dangers with which he is surrounded. In solitude the dangers are few, and consequently a weaker degree of virtue may be sufficient to resist them; but in the world temptations are most violent and allurements to pleasure most incessant; and on that account the most fervent piety and the most determined fidelity are requisite in order to insure a victory over them.

But that I may refute at once an error that is so prevalent and so injurious to Christian piety, I will ask what were the motives that induced the founders of religious orders to assemble people, and to subject them to rules of such severe discipline? Did they pretend to prescribe a new gospel to their followers, or make additions to the severe maxims which Jesus proposes to the rest of the faithful?

Their motives were these. When the whole body of Christians formed, in the midst of a corrupted world, one assemblage of saints; when women displayed the bright lustre of piety by their modesty and chastity; when each individual of the faithful shone like a star in the midst of the firmament of a degenerate world, and by the purity and integrity of his moral conduct compelled even pagans to respect the sanctity of his religion; then it was useless to retire into solitude: the Church itself was the asylum of virtue, and the path which the generality of Christians trod was the path which led to Heaven. But when Christian charity began to cool, and fervour diminished in proportion as the profession of the Christian faith was extended; when the world itself embraced the doctrine of the gospel, and introduced into the Church its inseparable attendants—immorality and remissness,—then it was that the chosen vessels of grace, beholding the rapidity with which the deluge of iniquity was inundating the fair inheritance of the Lord, and perceiving that the lives of the generality of Christians were no longer regulated according to the maxims of the gospel, sought an asylum in retirement, established houses of refuge in the wild and barren deserts, and invited the fervent and timid to join with them, and endeavour by flight to escape the general corruption.

The founders of these numerous communities had no other motive in view than that of perpetuating the primitive spirit of Christianity, and of facilitating to their disciples the observance of the gospel maxims—those maxims, I mean, which all, even in the midst of the world, are obligated to observe. They were, I allow, subjected to many rules and restraints and privations, to which it is not necessary that people in the world should be subjected: but they were subjected to all these for no other reason than that they might be enabled to fulfil with greater ease the precepts which we are all obliged to fulfil. Thus, for example, they were enjoined to observe perpetual continency (a duty which is not imposed on all); but their motive was, that they might observe with greater ease the virtue of purity and chastity, which is a general duty. They were subjected in like manner to the law of silence at stated times; but this was with no other view than that they might be more securely guarded against the dangers of idle and foolish conversation, and against the dangers of détraction and calumny; dangers against which all Christians ought to be guarded. They were, moreover, required to renounce all that they possessed, and to embrace the state of poverty and abjection: but this was only that they might more easily acquire that poverty of spirit, and that contempt of riches and of all transitory things, which ought to be possessed by all. They were likewise immured within the walls of retirement; but it was only that they might be farther removed from the pomps and pleasures of the world, which we all renounced in baptism. Lastly, they were subjected to severe fasts, watchings, and self-denials. But why was this done? Why, for the purpose of subduing the rebellious inclinations of the flesh, which we are all obliged to subdue, and to make it subservient to the spirit.

The law of penance under which they lived was the law of the gospel, and it is our law likewise. They lived in solitude, like strangers and pilgrims on earth: had they continued to live in the midst of the world with the same mortified and Christian spirit which carried them into retirement, and accompanied them there, they would have done the same.

From this statement we must draw the following conclusion: that we have fewer helps than they, and the same duties to fulfil: that we do not actually renounce the world, and that we are obliged, like them, to be poor in spirit, and to use all temporal things as if we used them not: that, although we are surrounded by all the allurements of sensuality, and the greater number engaged in the holy state of matrimony, we are yet obliged to possess the vessels of our

bodies in purity and holiness, and to make a covenant with our eyes not to think of dangerous objects: that, although we are seated in the midst of the greatest luxuries of the table, we are obliged to keep a strict watch over the sensual appetite, and to observe, as well as the most mortified hermit, the frugality enjoined by the gospel: that, without being subjected to the law of silence, we are obliged to place a guard of circumspection over our lips, and to regulate our words according to the rules of justice and charity: that, although living in the world, we must form as it were a solitude in our hearts, where the God of peace may reside, and where we ourselves may from time to time retire from the noise and dissipation of the world, in order to pour forth our souls before him: in a word, that, although we are not enjoined to perform the same acts of mortification as they, we are nevertheless obliged to bear in our bodies the marks of Christ crucified, to deny ourselves incessantly, and to do penance in proportion to our iniquities.

Let it not, therefore, be said that the austerities of the gospel are not practicable unless we renounce the world, and fly into the desert. Is the gospel to be followed only by the recluse? Are chastity, temperance, poverty of spirit, contempt of the world, and self-denial, virtues that can be practised only in the cloister? This is certainly an erroneous supposition. Ah! my beloved, it is a work of much greater difficulty, to obtain salvation in the midst of the world, than in the shades of retirement. It is much more difficult to be chaste in the midst of danger, humble in the midst of honours and dignities, temperate in the midst of luxuries, mortified and penitent in the midst of continual allurements to pleasure, meek and patient in the midst of the incessant jarrings of interest and passion; and yet, if we are deficient in any of these points, our souls are lost. Truly, my God! might we say, that the austerities of severe discipline are less necessary in the bosom of retirement, because less circumspection is required when the danger is removed to a greater distance; whereas they are indispensable in the world, where, on account of the multiplied and incessant dangers which surround us, piety cannot be maintained without the strictest vigilance and the minutest attention.

Nevertheless, my beloved, notwithstanding the peace and security of a cloistered life, notwithstanding the precautions with which the pious founders endeavoured to close every avenue against the world and the devil, those holy souls trembled at the thought of their own weakness, and watched and prayed without ceasing, lest they should fall into temptation:

it was with difficulty that they resisted the violence of their own innate corruption, and on numberless occasions were they exposed to the danger of losing in an instant the fruits of a long life of recollection and penance. And we, stationed as we are in the midst of perils, we flatter ourselves that we are privileged to live in greater ease, and to indulge in greater liberties! We, surrounded on every side by all the allurements of vanity and pleasure, encompassed about by all the snares of the devil and hell, we imagine that we are in a state of comparative security; that extraordinary exertion is not required from us; and that indolence and tepidity, and self-gratification, will not contribute to hasten our destruction! But, my God! with what appearance of truth can it be said, that the man who is exposed in the midst of the boisterous ocean has less reason to provide for his safety, than the man who is sheltered from the winds and waves?

When David, in the desert and barren mountains, whither he had fled in order to escape the fury of Saul, proposed to his followers to issue forth from their dens and caverns and attack the Philistines, they replied: We are not secure even in this wilderness; we are in hourly danger of falling into the hands of our enemy; how much more if we descend into the plains and attack the Philistines? The same words might the pious inhabitants of the desert address to you: We are seized with fear even in our solitude: we are a continual temptation to ourselves, even in the security of the asylums into which we were led by a merciful Providence in our earlier years: we here work out our salvation with trembling: we pray: we mourn: we perceive that retirement itself would be prejudicial to our innocence, were we not to labour incessantly to acquire a constant recollection of spirit, and to mortify our passions. And do you pretend to persuade us that we should have less to fear, that we stand less in need of watchfulness, of circumspection, and of prayer, if we resided, like you, in the midst of the world, surrounded by so many snares, and exposed to the dangerous influence of such bad example? Penance is our only security even in solitude; and do you imagine that luxury and pleasure would not expose our salvation to danger, in the midst of the world itself?

4. But, my Christian friends, we will no longer insist on your comparing the numberless dangers to which you are exposed in the world, and the precautions of self-denial, of prayer, and of watchfulness, which are requisite in order to overcome them, with the security of the cloister, in which fewer precautions seem to be necessary; we will

turn to another subject, and exhort you to compare the history of your lives, and of the irregularities of your past conduct, with that of the holy penitents who inhabit those consecrated abodes; the satisfaction which you owe to God, with that which they owe to him.

Ah! you seem to entertain the idea that those sequestered and guileless Christians, who have borne the yoke of the Lord from their infancy; who have been educated within the precincts of the temple; who, so far from being infected, are unacquainted with the corruption of the world; and whose most criminal imperfections would be almost virtues in you; you seem to entertain the idea that they alone are bound to mourn and weep in sackcloth and ashes, to renounce every sensual enjoyment, and to die daily in the cause of virtue and holiness. At the same time you fondly imagine that you, whose sins have been increasing in number and in enormity from your younger years, who hardly dare to fix your eyes steadfastly on the heap of wrath which you have accumulated, and whose lives have been almost totally alienated from the service of God, you fondly imagine that your duties are much lighter than theirs; that prodigality, pleasures, theatrical exhibitions, immodest dress, sensuality, and excess, are not so criminal in you as in them; that Heaven may be purchased by you at an easier rate; that tears, fastings, and penitential austerities are for them only, and not for you; that they are obliged to suffer, to pray, to mourn, to chastise their flesh, and that you are privileged to spend your days in indolence, and in the pleasing gratification of the sensual appetite. Good God! how rash, how inconsiderate, how unwarrantable will the conduct of the sinner appear, when he shall be judged according to the unerring rules of truth and justice!

Look therefore to yourselves, Christian brethren. Do not be led astray by the flattering idea that you will experience greater mildness from your Judge at the great trial than your more guiltless brethren. The gospel is your law; by that you will be judged. Think seriously on this whilst you have time; regulate your lives according to its maxims; be faithful, wanting in nothing; for it is thus only that you can make yourselves acceptable to God, and insure to yourselves the possession of that ineffable bliss which he has prepared for those who love him with sincerity and truth.

LVII.—EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DETRACTION.

"And behold some of the Scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth."—*Matt.*, ix, 3.

There is no vice, perhaps, which Christians are more ingenious in concealing from their own eyes, and which is attended with more irreparable consequences, than that which the Scribes were guilty of on this occasion—I mean the vice of detraction. It is a vice which pervades every department of the Christian world; it penetrates into the asylums of devotion and piety as well as into the assemblies of riot and dissipation. It is a vice with which almost every tongue is defiled, and every life contaminated.

Were I to give a general description of the baseness, the cruelty, and the irretrievable mischief incident to this vice, without entering into a refutation of the pretexts which are alleged by all in justification of themselves, I should, perhaps, lead you astray; and instead of opening your eyes to behold the guilt which you yourselves have probably contracted, induce you to believe that the crime is of a nature too odious and too enormous to be committed without scruple or remorse.

In order, therefore, that you may be able to examine yourselves minutely on this head, I will expose the guilt which is contracted on those occasions when it is supposed that detraction is innocent, namely, when the faults censured seem to be of too trifling a nature to attach guilt on the censurer; secondly, when the public notoriety of the facts seems to preclude the possibility of farther injury; and thirdly, when zeal for truth and for the honour and glory of God seems to require that notice should be taken of the abuses which are committed by the more dissolute among our Christian brethren. The subject is important; and that nothing may be lost for want of room to expatiate as amply as possible upon it, I shall confine myself at present to the first of the three heads or particulars which I have just mentioned, reserving the two others for your consideration on the following Sunday.

1. The tongue, according to the apostle James, is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, a restless evil, an overflowing source of deadly poison. (*James*, iii, 6, 8.) Had it been my intention to describe the malignity of detraction, these are

the epithets which I would have applied to the tongue of the detractor. I would have said that it was a devouring fire which spread ruin and desolation on every side; which spared nothing, sacred or profane; which blackened what it could not consume; and which was as dreadful in its consequences when covered over and working in secret as when raging with open violence. I would have said that it was a world of iniquity; a composition of many vices—of pride, which discovered a mote in the eye of another, and saw not the beam in its own—of envy, which repined at the prosperity of others, and defamed their character to lessen their enjoyments—of duplicity, which calumniated others when absent, and flattered them when present—of barbarity, which stabbed, as it were, an unresisting brother behind his back—of scandal, which occasioned the guilt of sin in every individual who gave ear to the detraction—of injustice and robbery, which took away by violence from a neighbour that which was the most dear to him. I would have said that it was a restless evil, which destroyed the bands of society, kindled dissensions in kingdoms, cities, and families, dissolved the most intimate friendships, spread disorder and confusion on every side, and banished far from it the amiable virtues of peace, meekness, and Christian charity. I would have said that it was an overflowing source of deadly poison; that everything which proceeded from it, and everything which surrounded it, was infected; that its applauses were suspicious, and even its very silence was expressive; that its gestures, its movements, its looks, all had their separate meanings, and distilled a fatal poison into the hearts of all who had the misfortune to associate, or in any manner to come in contact with it.

These would have been the subjects of my discourse had it been my intention to display before you the enormity of this detestable vice; but, as I before remarked, a general description of this kind would not have its intended effect on your minds; it would shock your feelings, but it would not enable you to discover the share of guilt which you yourselves have probably contracted. It is for this reason that I shall confine my observations to those points which appear less criminal, and lay the subject before you in a light far different from that in which you have been accustomed to view it.

It is too frequently said that the guilt contracted by exposing the trivial faults of your neighbour is of no great consequence; and that, when it is considered that your design is not to stigmatize your brother, but to indulge a little innocent mirth over failings which do not disgrace him in the

eyes of men, the most rigid morality could not reasonably accuse you of a crime. Now let us examine into the nature of this grand argument. You call it *a little innocent mirth;* but, my beloved, is it an *innocent mirth* to be amused at the failings of a fellow-member? Is it a Christian pleasure that is excited by the rehearsal of crimes which offend the God of majesty, and for which your neighbour will have to give a strict account hereafter? Jesus declares that guilt is contracted by every idle word, and are not derisions and censures of far greater magnitude? The law pronounces a curse on those who uncover the shame of their brethren; and will not the same malediction attach to those who add to the disclosure raillery and insult? The scriptures declare, that to call a brother in anger by a certain term of reproach, is a crime of great magnitude; and will not he be guilty of a crime equally great, who makes him the sport and scorn of a mixed assembly? Ah! my brethren, charity does not rejoice at evil in this manner; the man that loves his neighbour as himself cannot thus amuse himself with his misfortunes.

Are there not other subjects in abundance for conversation? Cannot society be enlivened and animated unless the dearest interests of your brethren are sacrificed for your entertainment? St. Paul admonishes you to edify one another by words of peace and charity. Supposing, therefore, that you were to relate the amiable qualities of your neighbour, and the virtues of those who are gone before you with the sign of faith; supposing that you were to recount the wonderful works of God, the histories of his mercies to mankind; supposing that you were to animate each other to piety by the consideration of the instability of all earthly things, the emptiness of all worldly enjoyment, and the anxiety and remorse which embitter the cup of sensual pleasures; supposing that these were the subjects of your conversations, would there not be abundant room for reflection and remark? Would they be too dull, too insipid, to rouse your feelings or animate your souls? These, at least, were the subjects of conversation amongst the primitive Christians; and the joy and consolation which they inspired smoothed the rugged paths of affliction, and encouraged them to patience and perseverance in the pursuit of virtue and holiness. If the same subjects do not interest you in the same manner, the reason is that your hearts are corrupted, and that a reform is essentially requisite for the promoting of your eternal welfare.

You perhaps will say, that when you converse about the failings of your neighbour, you are not actuated by envy or

malice. But, my beloved, were you to examine, you probably would discover that there are certain individuals whose failings were more generally the topics of your discourse than those of others: and if so, it is more than probable that your real motive is either envy, jealousy, antipathy, malice, or hatred. But supposing that you are actuated on those occasions merely by levity and indiscretion, do you think that even then you would be excusable in the sight of God? Levity and indiscretion are unbecoming a Christian at all times, and are frequently censured in the holy writings; and will they authorize the vice of detraction? Ah! of what consequence is it to the brother whom you have defamed, whether you were actuated by malice or by indiscretion? Does the arrow, which is shot at random, cause a less dangerous, a less painful wound, than the one which is designedly pointed at you? Such conduct, my beloved, cannot be justified; for in the whole circle of Christian duties there is not one that requires more circumspection and prudence: the whole law is included in the virtue of charity; and by transgressing against charity, you transgress against the whole law. It never happens that you speak indiscreetly about yourselves; that you fail in attention to your own honour and reputation: and if you are not as careful in respect to your neighbour's reputation as you are in respect to your own, the reason is, that you have not that love for your neighbour which charity requires.

2. The motive, therefore, for these detractions, is not sufficient to excuse you from sin. We will now examine the circumstances that attend them; and you will see that there is nothing in any of these that can possibly justify them.

You say that the faults which you censure are trivial—faults that do not diminish his reputation in the eyes of others. Allowing that they are faults of this description, is it not more criminal in you to publish them? The fewer the failings are of any individual, the greater are his claims to your indulgence: he is so much the more respectable; and if you refuse him that respect, you are so much the more inexcusable; and of you it might be said in the words of our Saviour: because your neighbour is good, your eye is evil.

Perhaps, however, the faults are not so trivial as you are willing to suppose: at least, would you call them trivial if you yourselves were accused of them? What are your feelings when you learn that certain imperfections to which you are subject—imperfections, I mean, which do not materially affect your reputation, have been introduced into

conversation, and treated with ridicule and mirth? Ah! then the insult appears to you intolerable: you magnify everything: you represent the injury as of serious consequence: you examine into the motives that actuated the authors, and do not hesitate to accuse them of the worst that can disgrace a Christian. In vain do your friends declare that no injury was intended or done to you: your resentment is carried beyond bounds, and you consider it as a singular act of Christian meekness, if, in compliance with the gospel, you formally forgive it. Be as delicate of the reputation of your neighbour as of your own, and you will not expose his failings under pretence that they are insignificant and incapable of affecting his reputation.

But, may it not be asked whether you always adhere to the letter of the truth when you introduce these trivial faults to the notice of others; for additions to a tale are not uncommon? Trivial stories require embellishments, else they are not worth attending to; and the more trivial they are, the greater embellishments they require. If therefore you have recourse to these artifices, if you throw out distant hints, if you pretend to conceal the more important circumstances, if by your motions you intimate that more is to be understood than the sense of the word conveys, the nature of your crime is changed, and instead of incurring the guilt of detraction only, you incur the more odious guilt of calumny.

It is necessary likewise to inquire, not only whether the faults were trivial in themselves, but against whom was the accusation directed. On some particular points the least reflection thrown out upon the fair sex would be an essential injury; the most groundless report, a public scandal; the most trivial jest an affront; the least suspicion, an accusation. Were your accusations directed against a parent, or a superior whom you were bound to honour and respect, you would add to your guilt the crime of ingratitude. Were you to defame a minister of the altar, who is bound by the sanctity of his profession to a life of greater innocence and purity, you would inflict a deeper wound than if you had defamed an individual in common life.

I know that our conversation among men is not always blameless—not always undeserving of reproof; and it can hardly be expected that the world should honour and respect a character which we dishonour ourselves. But, my beloved, our imperfections ought to excite your grief, and not your censures and ridicule. God frequently chastises the sins of his people by the irregularities of the clergy; he refuses to raise up venerable pastors and zealous ministers, who might

stem the torrent of licentiousness and vice; he permits the holy flames of piety and love to be extinguished in the breasts of those whose duty it is to enkindle them in yours; the light, which should enlighten you to be changed into darkness; the men who ought to be the coöperators of your salvation, to be the promoters of your destruction. These are the severest judgments which God in his wrath inflicts on kingdoms and empires: and would you have reason to glory and exult were you to observe symptoms of this terrible chastisement in the pastors that are placed over you? And what if they should err? Men are not angels, although encompassed with a dignity that should render them little inferior to them: they are weak and frail; but their ministry is blameless: at all events, they are the fathers and keepers of your souls; and what child would be justified in any attempt to throw ridicule upon them in exposing their secret failings?

It may have happened that your censures were levelled against men who openly espoused the cause of piety, and whose virtues were esteemed by the whole circle of their acquaintance. Perhaps you have intimated, with an air of sarcasm, that genuine piety was not so easily found, and that were we able to examine the heart, we should discover little difference between the man who is exteriorly virtuous and him who is exteriorly dissolute. By such intimations as these you may have given a bias to the minds of your hearers, and diminished their respect for those men whose piety had hitherto appeared unblemished and sincere in their eyes.

Now are these detractions trivial and unimportant? Ah! the Lord resides in the soul of the just, as he formerly resided in the holy tabernacle: their cause he considers as his own, and he chastises as severely the outrages and affronts which are offered to them, as if they were offered to himself in person. Although they may sometimes lean aside, like the ark of Israel, when conducted by David in triumph into Jerusalem; that is, although they may sometimes betray the weakness of human nature, for there is no virtue so pure and so protected as to be entirely exempt from failings; nevertheless, the Lord is provoked if the officious worldling, like Oza, dare to lift up his hand, and call the attention of the multitude to this irregularity of the moment. In scripture language, they are the apple of his eye: he feels the slightest injury that is offered to them: he will not endure that virtue, which has found admirers even in the most barbarous nations, should be treated with derision and scorn by Christians; and if he does not immediately strike the rash

defamer, as he formerly dealt with the presumptuous Israelites, he refuses to impart to him the precious gifts of grace and sanctity which he has despised in others; and thus restrains his arm only to inflict the severest judgments on him hereafter.

3. Important, therefore, are these trivial detractions as you call them, both in their motives and circumstances. We will now examine them in their consequences, and you will perceive that these are far greater than you had imagined, and that they are almost irreparable.

The crime of sensuality may be expiated by mortification and penance; the crime of hatred, by brotherly love; the crime of injustice, by a full restitution to the injured party: the crime even of libertinism and impiety, by a religious and public respect for the faith of your ancestors; but by what virtues are you to expiate the crime of defamation? You, perhaps, disclosed the secret to one only individual; but to whom has it been disclosed since? This individual, probably, had other intimates whom he judged worthy of his confidence: these intimates, considering it perhaps, as no longer a secret, divulge it to the whole circle of their acquaintance. Each one, probably, added to the tale: each one related it in his best manner, and embellished it with such remarks as were suggested either by his malice or wit. The farther it is extended, the more circumstantial, the more injurious it becomes. Like fire, the sparks of which are scattered by an impetuous wind, it spreads ruin and devastation on every side. The torrent, which was almost imperceptible in its source, is swelled in its progress by the innumerable rivulets that flow into it, and at length inundates the whole country. At first it was only a secret anecdote, an imprudent reflection, an ill-natured conjecture; but by additions and misrepresentations it is become a serious matter—a public and formal disgrace—a common topic of conversation—an indelible stain. And how will you repair such a widely extended scandal? How will you restore to your brother the good name which he has lost. Will you dare to oppose your voice singly against the universal opinion? Will you dare to stand alone in his defence? Probably you would not be listened to; or perhaps, your interference would be attributed to ignorant simplicity; and fresh injuries might be the consequence of your ill-timed panegyrics.

What numberless crimes, my brethren, are sometimes occasioned by one only sin of detraction! You will have to answer for them all: you are the detractor as often as the detraction is repeated; as often as the detraction is heard

with pleasure. Good God! these are sins of which no one knows either the extent or the magnitude, neither can any one ascertain the injury which our neighbour has sustained, the happiness of which he has been deprived, or the restitution which it is incumbent on the detractor to make. This, indeed, is certain, that the man who is a rock of scandal to his brethren, takes part with the declared enemy of mankind, whose object it is to make void the glorious work of our redemption, and involve us all in one common sentence of irreparable perdition.

Entertain, therefore, a due respect for the reputation of your neighbour, even the same respect which you entertain for your own: disclose no secret failings, harbour no suspicions, form no conjectures. Endeavour to excuse him on all occasions when his reputation is attacked in your presence, and do the same for him which you would wish him to do for you were you in his situation. Thus you will avoid the fatal rock, on which thousands have split and suffered shipwreck; you will draw down the blessing of God, and be favoured with graces which are never imparted to the detractor and calumniator.

LVIII.—NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON DETRACTION.

"Speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another."—*Eph.*, iv, 25.

The admonition of the apostle, in the words of my text, relates to the same subject which occupied your attention last Sunday: "Speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour:" injure no man in words; set a guard upon your lips: be circumspect in all you utter: watch over the reputation of your brother with as much solicitude as one member of the body watches over the welfare of another; "for we are members one of another."

My remarks to you, last Sunday, upon this subject, were limited to one single point; they were directed to show that defamation and scandal are not justified by the pretence that the faults we censure are of a trifling nature; I shall now resume the argument, and will endeavour to demonstrate that it is contrary to Christian humility, charity, and justice, to make even the public and known crimes of a neighbour

the topics of conversation; and that no plea, not even that of the utmost zeal for the honour and glory of God, can be a sufficient warrant to authorize any individual to speak ill of another.

It is contrary, in the first place, to *Christian humility*. Were you truly sensible of your own wretched state, were your own sins continually before your eyes, you would have neither leisure nor inclination to remark the faults of others. The greater the publicity is with which the sins of a neighbour are attended, the more your compassion ought to be excited, and the greater reason you have to bless the mercies of the Lord which have preserved you from the like misfortune. Your crimes, perhaps, are not less enormous than those of your brother; and if your honour and reputation are yet untarnished, it is not owing to any merit of yours; and so far from having any right to glory in the shame of another, you ought to humble yourselves in the sight of Him who beholds your multiplied iniquities, and tremble lest he should spare you in this world for no other purpose than to inflict severer judgments on you hereafter.

These are the sentiments which Christian humility suggests on those occasions when the public failings of others are made the subjects of conversation. The example of our Saviour on this head is striking and expressive. When the woman taken in adultery was presented to him, he observed a profound silence; and notwithstanding the certainty and publicity of her guilt, he made no other reply to the malicious and pressing instances of her accusers than: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her."—*John*, viii, 7: as if he said: It is not for sinners like you to condemn without mercy a fellow culprit: this is a right which is reserved only for him who is without reproof.

Attend to the import of these words, my beloved, and adopt them for your rule of conduct. If your neighbour be detected in a crime, turn to yourselves before you pass sentence on him: look into your own interior, examine whether you yourselves have not contracted guilt equal to that of your neighbour: and if you are without sin, then throw what obloquies you please upon him; but if you discover within you the defilements of sin, as you undoubtedly will, then be silent; it is not for you to condemn your brother. If you transgress in this point, you have reason to fear that in punishment of your defamations you yourselves will be delivered into the hands of defamers, and that the shafts of calumny and ridicule will be turned against you. "All that take the sword, shall perish by the sword."—*Matt.*, xxvi, 52.

If you wound your neighbour's reputation with the sword of detraction, the hour may come when you yourselves will be wounded with the same weapon; and although you may not have to reproach yourselves at present with the failings which you so liberally censure in others, the time may be hastening forward, when, left to yourselves in punishment of your uncharitableness, you may be insensibly led to the commission of greater crimes, and may live to see with unavailing sorrow what it is to be held up as objects of contempt and derision to those about you.

It is the nature of pride to work its own disgrace. One way or other, it is sure to be humbled. Peter, at the last supper, felt indignant at the idea of betraying his Lord and Master, and was the most eager to discover the man who was to perpetrate the crime; in the space of a few hours he himself fell into the same sin of infidelity against which he had previously declaimed with so much bitterness. There is nothing that more effectually contributes to banish God from the heart than the malicious pleasure which is enjoyed in scandal and defamation; his mercy cannot endure that those afflicting examples, which he permits only with the view of reminding us of our own weakness, and of renewing our vigilance, should flatter our pride, and excite our derision and contempt.

The same injury which is offered to Christian humility, by making the faults of a neighbour the topic of our discourse, however public they may be, is offered likewise to Christian charity; for "charity dealeth not perversely."—1 *Cor.*, xiii, 4. If the failings which you censure are publicly known, what reason is there for again relating them? Do you wish to express your abhorrence of the conduct of the person you condemn? But what purpose will this answer? He probably will never be informed of your sentiments; and if he should, do you think that he is not already sufficiently humbled? His fault has perhaps been exaggerated by the tongues of malice, and propagated with such degrading circumstances as to blacken his reputation for ever; and is not this a sufficient punishment? Ah! he is more deserving of your pity than of your reproaches.

But perhaps you had some suspicion beforehand, that sooner or later, what has happened would come to pass; and now, finding that you were right in your conjecture, you cannot help communicating it to your friends. This, if it is your motive, is indeed a most unchristian motive. What! then you insult and triumph over your fallen brother, merely because you had foreseen his misfortune; or rather, you seek

to be glorified and honoured by others for no other reason than because you had judged evil of your neighbour—because you had passed sentence on him before he had committed the crime! And what reason is there for glory in all this? The gospel does not allow you to condemn your brother even after the offence has been committed; and shall it be allowed you to pass sentence upon him while he is innocent?

Ah! if you can so accurately pry into the fate of others, why not look a little more narrowly into your own? Can you not descry something of the heavy judgments that await you, if you do not speedily renounce that spirit of dissipation and gaiety, that the love of the world, that itch for defamation and scandal, which possess your souls? Why not exert your prophetic powers on this subject? You may here give full scope to your conjectures, without danger of error; your predictions will be most advantageous to your own welfare; and why not apply your mind to them? Shall your attention be constantly fixed on the mote which is in your brother's eye, and no means be taken to remove the beam which is in your own? Let not such inconstancy, my beloved, be imputed to you.

But to proceed with our subject. The more the faults of your neighbour are known, the more pressing motives you have to lament the consequences; your brethren are so much the more scandalized; the libertine takes the greater occasion of blaspheming against religion, of strengthening himself in the ways of sin, of propagating the idea that all men are subject alike to failings, and that they who are accounted virtuous owe their reputation to their dexterity in concealing their corruption from the eyes of others; the piety of the weak is so much the more endangered; and more powerful inducements are held out to the wavering Christian to follow his example.

These are consequences which ought to excite your tears; and, if you had any love for piety and goodness, the view of these deplorable effects ought to stimulate you to endeavour, as far at least as your silence can effect it, to consign them to oblivion, and blot them for ever from the memory of man. But, perhaps, you will say that they are now the general topic of discourse, and that as your silence can be of little avail, your speaking about them can be of little consequence. This, my beloved, is not reasoning like Christians. Shall it be allowed you to heap additional infamy and disgrace on your neighbour, because you cannot rescue him from that which he has already endured?—to increase the scandal

because you cannot prevent it?—to throw the stone at him, and accelerate his ruin, because you see every other person is disposed to do it? Oh no; this is not reasoning nor acting like Christians, nor like men. Were religion out of the question, it would be noble, it would be dignified, to take the part of the unfortunate; it would bespeak greatness of soul to afford protection to the wretch who is forsaken by the rest of the world. If charity, therefore, did not require you to be silent on these occasions, humanity alone would suggest the propriety of such a mode of conduct.

In the third place, you violate the laws of justice as often as you converse about the failings of your neighbour. We still proceed on the supposition that these failings are publicly known. Now place yourselves in his situation, and tell me whether you would require less delicacy, less humanity from him towards you, merely because your reputation has sustained the greatest injury, and your faults have been divulged to the whole neighbourhood? Tell me whether you would consent that he should take part with the rest, and join in the public cry against you, in the same manner as you do against him; and if he was to bring forward, in justification of his conduct, the notoriety of the fact, tell me whether such an excuse would not be considered by you as an exaggeration of his offence, rather than as an alleviation of the injury you had sustained?

It would not be amiss for you likewise to inquire whether the author of these reports was not an impostor. There are so many false rumours propagated, and the world is so ready to think evil of any one, that a person cannot be too cautious in giving credit to them. Some owe their origin to the envy and malice of ill designing people; others to the rancour and animosity of a revengeful mind. Examples of this kind are very common. Others again are occasioned by the indiscretion of individuals who had no intention of defaming their neighbour; a word of double meaning, perhaps unintentionally spoken, might have been wrongly interpreted; this might have given rise to conjecture, which, passing from mouth to mouth, might have been reported at last as a real fact. Such a thing is by no means impossible, nor is it very improbable. The number of evil reports that arise from mistakes of this kind are very numerous. What could be more strongly attested than the pretended crime of Susanna? She was publicly accused by men venerable for their age and dignity; she was traduced by the whole people as an adultress, as a dishonour to Israel; and yet she was innocent, or rather it was her innocence alone that was the cause of her

disgrace. Our blessed Saviour was publicly calumniated as an impostor, a Samaritan, and a seducer of the people. These calumnies were supported by the authority of the priests and Pharisees, men of the first rank and character—men who were universally looked upon as the best judges. And do you suppose that any of the multitude were free from sin, who relying on the publicity and authority of these reports, treated our blessed Lord with indignity, and joined the standard of his enemies to oppose him?

On what false grounds, then, do you rest your hopes of security, when, building on the faith and veracity of public report, you have the temerity to sit in judgment on your neighbour? His guilt, must in some degree, be considered as doubtful as long as it is not absolutely clear to you that he is really culpable; consequently your report concerning him, if it goes in the least to the detriment of his general character, and has not the sanction of clear and undeniable evidence, is an act of crying injustice against him.

But, supposing that you had witnessed his crime, and that the fact were purely as you had reported it, you would not even then be entirely exculpated. For aught you know, your neighbour has entered into himself and washed away all his stains by the tears of repentance. Grace is not always slow in its operations; it sometimes obtains the victory over a corrupted heart in an instant; a public fall is frequently the cause of a perfect conversion. Now, if this be the case, if your brother be repentant and reformed (and you cannot be certain that he is not), is it not unjust—is it not cruel to revive the remembrance of that which penance has effaced, and which the Lord hath forgotten? You have the history of Magdalen; her crimes were public; the whole city was in a manner privy to them; and yet, at the very time the Pharisee turned away from her with disgust and abhorrence, she was purified in the sight of God; her tears and her love had obtained the forgiveness of her sins at the feet of Jesus: still there was no refuge for her, no compassion in the heart of a fellow-creature.

Be upon your guard, therefore, my beloved brethren. Throw a covering over the failings of your neighbour, and deal by him as the Lord in his tender mercy is accustomed to deal by you. He will not reveal your sins until the great day arrive when the secrets of all hearts will be finally disclosed. Follow his example. Put a restraint upon your tongue; suffer no remarks on the failings of another to escape from your lips; whenever the trumpet of defamation is sounded in your presence, if you cannot instantly silence it,

show by your countenance at least your utter disbelief and abhorrence of the slanderous tale. Guard against the infection which is spread by the envenomed tongues of calumny. You cannot be too careful in your precautions; for the sin of hearkening to detraction with complacency is not inferior in guilt to the sin of detraction itself. If detraction met with no admirers, the kingdom of Jesus would soon be freed from this scandal.

2. But unfortunately the vice of detraction is a pleasing vice; and contributing as it does to enliven conversation, it cannot fail of being applauded: the man who is agreeable in company is always admired and courted. This is the taste of the world; and it is not suprising, when we reflect that Christian charity is a virtue with which the world is totally unacquainted. But that the same love of detraction should be found in the assembly of the faithful—that piety itself should be brought in to sanction it, is almost beyond the powers of conception. Yet, incredible as it is, it is a fact that many who pretend to a virtuous life are equally guilty of this scandalous behaviour, and justify themselves by the plea of piety; they suppose that they are actuated by zeal, that they show forth their hatred of sin by condemning sinners, and that they give honour and glory to God by dishonouring and defaming those who offend him; as if piety, the essence and soul of which is charity, possessed the privilege of exempting its followers from the practice of that most indispensable virtue.

Now, my beloved friends—you, I mean, who are implicated in the above remark, let me entreat you to reflect a little on the rules which are prescribed to zeal by the unerring word of God. They may be reduced to four principal heads: 1st. True zeal is grieved at the sight of the innumerable scandals which dishonour the Church; but its grief is interior; it laments them before God; it is importunate in its supplications that he would be mindful of his ancient mercies to sinners; that he would look down with pity on his deluded creatures; that he would establish his reign in all hearts; and that he would withdraw the dissolute and abandoned from the error of their ways. This is the truly pious way of bewailing the offences of your neighbour; converse frequently with God about them, but forget them in the company of men.

2nd. Piety does not give you any authority or command over your neighbour: since, therefore, you are not responsible for his conduct, it is none of your concern whether he stand or fall, but the Lord's: the Church has her pastors to

watch over the flock, and from them an account will be required.

3rd. The zeal which is according to knowledge seeks the salvation, and not the humiliation, of a Christian brother: it seeks to edify by example, and not to injure by words: it appears in the most engaging forms, in order to win the affections of all, and promote their salvation; it is more grieved at sight of the wretched state of the sinner, than incensed and scandalized at the view of his failings; and so far from publishing them to others, it would conceal them even from his own eyes.

4th. The censorious zeal which is exerted against an offending brother, is productive of no good effect, because the party concerned is not present: on the contrary, it is productive of the worst effects; it is calculated only to irritate his mind, and impede his conversion, were he by any means to become aware of your officious and clandestine interference; it is injurious to his reputation; it is disgraceful to piety; it is a rock of scandal to your hearers, and frequently induces them to fall into the same crime. True zeal is humble, and fixes its eyes attentively on its own failings alone: true zeal is simple, more inclined to think good than evil: true zeal is merciful and indulgent to the weaknesses of others, but severe to its own: true zeal is timorous and reserved, and would rather suffer vice to pass uncensured, than expose itself to the danger of censuring the sinner unjustly.

These, my beloved, are the properties of true zeal. Be attentive to them, adopt them as your general rule of conduct. For why should the tongue which has confessed Jesus Christ, which has renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, which sings forth the praises of the God of peace at the foot of his altar, and which is frequently consecrated by the participation of the most holy mysteries, continue to be a restless and dangerous evil, discharging the gall of bitterness against its fellow-members? Is it not unworthy of the religion you profess, to unite your voices together in the assembly of the faithful, and conjointly to offer up the sacrifice of peace and love, and then to hurl the shafts of defamation against those very persons, whose union with you is so sacred, so indissoluble?

Let it be your constant endeavour to be prudent and temperate in your conversation, and to give no occasion to the dissolute to blaspheme against the religion you profess. Reprove your brethren for their faults, but let it be by the sanctity of your lives, and not by the asperity of your cen-

sures; let it be by the odour of good example, and not by the scandal of defamation. Virtue is rendered amiable and respectable by mildness, rather than by severity; the affections of sinners are gained by compassionating their weaknesses, rather than by publishing them. Be guided on all occasions by the dictates of charity; veil over and excuse their faults, and you will the more easily induce them to confess their guilt, and condemn themselves.

Thus you will gain over your brethren; you will do honour to true piety; you will contribute to banish from society the odious, the widely extended vice of detraction; and, after having shown mercy to your fellow-members on earth, you will present yourselves with greater confidence before the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, to request the same blessing for yourselves.

LIX.—TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

"See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, for the days are evil."—*Eph.*, v, 15, 16.

The source of every disorder that prevails among the children of men, is the improper use of time. Some linger out their lives in indolence and sloth, unprofitable both to the state, to their neighbours, and to themselves: others busy themselves about their temporal affairs, and about them only, without any other consideration. The first live as if they were placed upon earth for no other purpose than to shun labour and fatigue, and to endeavour by the variety of pleasures to escape that melancholy and irksomeness which are pursuing them on every side: the others seem to have no other business in life, than to labour for perishable things, and by means of the solicitudes and cares which they voluntarily create, to banish from their minds every reflection on the state of their interior. It seems as if time were a common enemy, and it were the wish and interest of all to get rid of it as quick as possible. Happy is the man, in the judgment of the world, who can so employ himself as not to perceive the length of time, and whose days seem to pass away so very rapidly, as scarcely to afford a few moments leisure for the slightest reflection on the manner in which they are spent.

In this manner is time, that most valuable gift of the

Almighty, considered as a burthen. We dread the approach of that moment, after which time will be no more; and we dread in almost equal degree the irksomeness which is occasioned by the duration of the present moment.

But, my beloved, let us reflect that time is given us for the purchase of eternity. The period of our existence on earth is short; let us therefore employ the whole of it in securing our salvation, for this is the will and intention of the giver. Let us learn the value of time, and we shall not squander it away; let us learn the proper use of time, and we shall devote it to the purpose for which it was given. Thus shall we avoid the perils which attend a life of indolence and ease; and we shall not be diverted from attending to the one thing necessary by the solicitudes and fatigues of business and labour. Be attentive to the considerations which I shall suggest on this important subject.

1. Time is of the utmost value and importance to us on three separate accounts. First, it is the price of eternity. Secondly, it is short, and we cannot be too early in taking advantage of it. Thirdly, it is irrevocable: what is once lost, is lost for ever.

By the sin of our first parents, we were all condemned to death, and according to the strict rules of infinite justice, the sacrifice of our lives might have been required of us the very instant we received our existence. The blood of Jesus alone has erased the sentence of immediate death: we are suffered to live, because our Redeemer has died for us. Our days and moments are the first blessings which flow to us from the cross. The time which we so foolishly squander away, is the price of his blood, the fruit of his death, and the reward of his sacrifice.

Moreover, by every sin that we commit we incur a fresh sentence of death: every time that we violate the law of the Author of Life, we are deserving of death. As often, therefore, as the mercies of God have suspended the execution of the sentence after the commission of crime, so often has he given us as it were a new life, that he might afford us an opportunity of making reparation for our past criminal abuse of time.

The life, therefore, which we enjoy after sin is, in a spiritual light, a continued miracle of mercy and love. Every instant that we are suffered to breathe is a new blessing which we receive from the God of justice. Now, to spend this time and these moments in trifles and in indolence is offering an insult to the infinite goodness of our Benefactor; it is prodigally wasting an inestimable gift, to which we had

no title; and it is exposing ourselves to the greatest danger of losing the price of eternity. This, my beloved, is the first crime which is incurred by the abuse of time.

We should accuse the man of an unpardonable act of folly who, instead of raising himself to eminence and honour, by means of the immense treasures which he inherited, should suffer himself, through indolence and want of care, to be stripped and plundered of all, without enjoying the least benefit from the temporary possession of it. Time, my beloved, is an invaluable treasure which has been bequeathed to us by our Lord, and into the possession of which we entered at our birth. We have it in our power now to make a proper use of it: we may purchase for ourselves all that is great and glorious: we may, by its means, exalt ourselves far above the crowd of the children of Adam, far above kings and emperors: we may by its means raise ourselves up to the mansions of the blessed, where all are kings, and where the reign of each one will extend through all eternity.

Is it not, therefore, an unpardonable act of folly to squander away in idle gratifications that inestimable treasure with which the most valuable of all possessions might be purchased? There is not a day, there is not an hour nor a moment in which we may not merit an increase of happiness for eternity; is it not, therefore, an incalculable loss to lose any part of it? Is it not an inconceivable thing that time should hang heavy on our hands, and that it should be a burden and a torment to us?

Time, moreover, is short, and we cannot be too early in taking advantage of it. Were the years of our existence on earth to be lengthened out like those of the ancient patriarchs (and even then the period would not be too long to be employed in purchasing eternal happiness), we might by superior diligence make up for any portion of time that we had ill spent. But, alas! the life of man is included within such contracted limits that not a moment is to be lost. The time of our sojourning here, comparatively speaking, is no more than a single instant: like the meteors which on a clear night are seen to glide across the firmament, we appear for a moment, and immediately vanish out of sight. We are here to-day, and are gone to-morrow. And how shall we find any time to squander away in a life that is so quickly spent? Reckon up the time that is necessarily spent in sleep, in providing for the necessities of the body, in the duties of our state in society, and what is there remaining for ourselves, for God, and for eternity? Is not that man a real object of pity who is at a loss how to dispose of those few moments, and

who has recourse to so many artifices to kill that time which is so valuable and so short?

Besides, my Christian brethren, consider what numberless crimes you have to expiate during this short space. Were your lives protracted to ten times their usual length, you would not have sufficient time to atone for one half of them; you would even then be obliged to throw yourselves at the feet of God, and beg that the many deficiencies that would remain might be filled up by his infinite mercies. And is time to be found for vanity and pleasure in a life in which so much is to be done? Ought any part of that period to be trifled away in dissipation and folly, the whole of which is not sufficient to satisfy for one single crime?

Ah! let us reflect seriously before it is too late. A criminal condemned to death, and who has but the respite of one day wherein to solicit and obtain his pardon, would not have much time to lose. He would not complain of the length of the day; he would not squander away in idle amusements the moments which were granted him for the purpose of soliciting and procuring his discharge. No; his whole attention, his whole soul would be taken up in the important business; he would endeavour by every means in his power to make up for the shortness of the time; and he would consider every moment as a thing of inestimable value. Senseless as we are, we ourselves are condemned!—the sentence is past; we have only one day allotted us—for life is but a day—wherein to avert the greatest of all misfortunes, and to obtain a discharge. And shall we spend this short, this fleeting day, in an indolent manner, in vain and childish pastimes? Shall we have recourse to expedients to fill up the vacant hours? Shall we calmly and contentedly behold the approach of evening, after having made no other use of the day than in heaping up a fresh treasure of wrath, and in rendering ourselves more deserving of the sentence which we have incurred?

Ah! we know not but the abuse of all this time will induce the Lord to abridge the term of our existence, and to call us away in the midst of our days. An unforeseen accident may befal us in an instant, and bereave us of life. How many sudden and alarming deaths do we hear of—deaths which are generally permitted to happen in punishment of the abuse of time! How many are surprised by the fatal stroke without time for repentance, with all their sins on their heads, and hurried before the awful tribunal of a just God before they have commenced the great work of repentance!

Never, therefore, let it be said of us, that we are at a loss

how to employ our time. How many holy solitaries have there been who, without any other business on their hands than that of salvation, complained that the day was too short; who devoted even the silent time of night to the same pious exercises in which they spent the day; and after all, lamented that the morning sun broke in upon them too soon, and interrupted their sweet canticles of praise and love. Even in the calm and leisure of retirement, these truly pious Christians had not too much time to employ in publishing and extolling the eternal mercies of their God; and shall we, whose duties and whose cares are so numerous—shall we, who live in the midst of the busy scenes of the world—shall we, who owe so much to relations, to children, to friends, to inferiors, to masters, to our country—shall we complain that the short space of time that is left at our disposal is too long to be employed in blessing and praising the holy name of our Creator?

Let it not, however, be understood that every kind of relaxation and amusement is forbidden. Nature requires that some time should be allotted to them, and religion only forbids that they should be indulged in to the prejudice of more essential duties, and particularly of the duty which we owe to God and to our own souls. Ah! when we are stretched on the bed of death we shall know the value of time; we shall be convinced of the impropriety and injustice of having alienated from his direct and immediate service one single moment beyond what the calls of nature or our temporal duties required.

The inconsistency of our conduct appears in a strong light, when we reflect that time lost is irrecoverable, and that, when it is once gone, it is gone for ever.

The loss of honours, riches, or pleasures, is not of such consequence, because they may be regained on some future occasion; but the loss of time is the loss of so many means of salvation, which will never be offered to us again. Considering the short period of our existence on earth, we have every reason to believe that every hour and every instant is given us for some particular purpose; that God has marked out the use to which each of them ought to be devoted; and that he has allotted special graces for each; and that he has appointed that each should contribute to the great work of our sanctification. By suffering these hours, therefore, to escape without being devoted to their proper use, we deprive ourselves of the graces which were attached to them, and consequently lose so many necessary helps for salvation.

The loss of time, moreover, is an irreparable loss. We

ought every day and every hour advance a step nearer Heaven. If we neglect to do this—if we misemploy those days and hours, we are as far behind in our journey; and when the end of our journey approaches, we shall discover that we are so far distant from the gaol. And how will it be possible for us, during the short period which will then remain of life, to make up for past indolence? Shall we be able to redouble our pace, and perform as much in one day as ought to have been performed during that long space of time which we spent in doing nothing to the purpose? And as to the works of satisfaction and penance, which ought to have been performed when we were in the strength and vigour of health, but which were neglected, how shall we be able to perform them all when our strength is gone, and the last hour of our existence is approaching? Ah! it will be vain then to say that God does not require impossibilities: it is we that have placed ourselves in this state: the number of our faults will not lessen our duties: sin must be punished before it is entirely effaced. God gave us sufficient time and strength for this purpose; if we have abused this blessing—if we have spent the time in accumulating fresh debts, and devoted our strength to other purposes than promoting the honour and glory of our Maker—it remains that God himself should execute what we have refused to do, and inflict due punishment on us in the next world for the crimes which we have neglected to expiate in this.

2. To all that I have hitherto said on the misemployment of time, it is very probable that the greater number of my hearers have replied in private to themselves, that their days are spent far otherwise than in indolence and sloth; that their occupations and duties are so numerous and urgent as to absorb their whole time, and seldom to leave one hour at their disposal.

But, my brethren, the Christian use of time does not consist merely in the whole of it being employed; it consists in employing it in a proper manner, and according to the will of him who gave it to you. In the first place, you must confine yourselves to the duties of your state of life, and exclude all those unnecessary cares and labours which te d only to the gratification of the passions. It not unfrequently happens that men engage in a multiplicity of engagements for no other purpose than to fill up their time, in order to avoid the gloom and uneasiness which they would experience if left to their own thoughts. Self-examination is an employment which they cannot endure: they are afraid to look into the state of their souls; they know that all is not right there, and there-

fore, to avoid the melancholy which would be diffused over their minds were they free from employment, they create a variety of occupations, in hopes of being able to live in entire forgetfulness of themselves. This certainly is not a Christian use of time.

Others are engaged in a variety of occupations which are nothing at all to their purpose. Others, in occupations that have no other object than the gratification of pride, vanity, sensuality, curiosity, ambition, or interest. These they attend to, without consulting in any manner the will of God, or any kind of reference to his honour and glory: they even attach such importance to them, as to be ready to neglect the concerns of God and of their own souls, rather than be deprived of the advantage or pleasures which may accrue from these trifling or criminal pursuits. This, too, it must be very evident, cannot be considered a Christian use of time.

We are enjoined by the gospel in the most precise terms, to refer all, whatsoever we do, to the honour and glory of God. Our whole time must be devoted to him. Every action, every pursuit, every labour and fatigue; every thing, in short, that engages our attention or employs our time, must contribute to the work of our sanctification, or it will be rejected by him as unprofitable; our days will not be full days in his estimation, unless they are full of those works which will merit the good things of eternity. Everything that we do with a view merely to temporal advantages, however high it may exalt us in the esteem of men, will be totally disregarded by him, as unworthy of his notice.

How different, my beloved, are the judgments of God in this respect, from the judgments of the world! In the opinion of the world, that man has gone through life honourably and usefully, who has brought up his family with credit and order, who has honestly increased the patrimony of his forefathers, and who has been respected and esteemed by his fellow creatures. But in the estimation of God, such a man is not entitled to an eternal recompense, nor to any merit in his sight, if the principal motive of his actions through life was to promote his own glory instead of his Maker's; to possess temporal advantages and comforts, instead of heaping up to himself treasures in Heaven; and to raise himself to eminence among his brethren, instead of walking in the humble steps of his crucified Jesus.

It will be vain for him to pretend to vindicate himself on the day of final retribution, by stating that his life was one of labour and fatigue. "True," it will be said, "you did

labour incessantly, but you did not labour to save your soul." It will be in vain to state that he provided handsomely for his children, and that he increased the fortune left him by his progenitors: the great Judge will reply: "You bequeathed the temporal goods to your family; but you did not bequeath to them the fear of the Lord, by instilling into their minds the principles of religion and piety." It will be in vain to state that he applied himself with unwearied diligence to the duties of his calling, that he had many friends, and that he was obliging and civil to all: the great Judge will reply: "You did, indeed, make to yourself friends on earth, but you did not make to yourself friends in Heaven: you laboured to acquire the esteem of men, but you were not solicitous to make yourself pleasing and acceptable to God. Nothing will avail you now, but those works which you performed with the view of promoting your salvation."

What an immense void, my beloved, will be discovered in our lives, how much time will be declared to have been misspent and lost, when the great Searcher of Hearts shall come to judge justice! Let us meditate frequently on these awful truths: time is short, it is irrecoverable; eternal happiness is to be purchased with it; it was given to us for that and no other purpose. Let us calculate from this statement, how much of it ought to be devoted to the world, to pleasures, and to the great work of salvation. Time is short, saith the apostle; let us, therefore, use this world as if we used it not; let us rejoice as if we rejoiced not; let us consider all that is transitory as no better than a shadow that passeth away: and let us consider that part of our lives only as profitably spent, which has been made to contribute to the great work of our sanctification.

LX.—TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FORGIVING INJURIES.

"So shall my Heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."—*Matt.*, xviii, 35.

The virtue which is enforced by the parable read in the gospel of this Sunday, forms one of the most distinguishing features of the true Christian. To forgive an injury, to love an enemy, are acts of the most heroic fortitude, and have been always admired and extolled by the wise and good of

every age and nation. The pagan philosophers were not unacquainted with the excellency of this virtue. They recommended it to their followers, and practised it themselves. Their motives, indeed, were not of the purest kind; but they admired the virtue, and although their inducement was pride or vanity, or their contempt for the ignoble passion of hatred and revenge, still they judged it necessary for the formation of the perfect man.

The motives upon which the Christian is enjoined to love his enemies increase the lustre and excellency of his virtue. He is to forgive injuries in obedience to the will of his Great Creator: he is to love all mankind because they are his brethren in Jesus Christ: he is to pardon all things in hopes of experiencing at the tribunal of his Judge the same mercy for himself. His charity is not to be circumscribed by time, place, or person: it is to be universal and without exception.

But, notwithstanding the excellence of this virtue, it is practised by very few even of those who call themselves Christians, and the neglect of it is considered justifiable. To this subject, therefore, I will call your attention, and will endeavour to show that the precept of Christian charity is equitable and just from the very pretexts which are usually alleged to justify the violation of it.

1. Were we to examine into the origin of the friendships and connections which subsist among individuals of the race we should find that they are constantly engendered and supported either by a similarity in their habits and dispositions, or else by interest and vanity. And, on the other hand, that the dislikes, the hatreds and animosities which are too often witnessed among us, are occasioned by the absence of one or other of the primary causes; that religion is seldom consulted on the business; and that friendships are formed and dissolved without any reference whatever to the duties of Christian charity.

But such an examination would be unnecessary. The pretexts which are usually alleged by the violators of the law of love in justification of their conduct, fully prove the truth of my position. On these, therefore, I will build my arguments. Be attentive, for the subject is important.

It is commonly said in the world, and I will suppose that it is you who say it, that such a person is disagreeable in his manners; that his conversation and behaviour are disgusting to you; that you feel an antipathy to him which you cannot account for; that to see or speak to such a person would increase the natural aversion which is so deeply rooted in your mind; that nature has its likes and dislikes, and that,

since they are not dependent on your will, you are not responsible for them.

To the world, perhaps, this reasoning may appear conclusive; but let us examine it in a religious point of view. Is not this person, whose manners and deportment are disgusting to you, a child of God, a brother of Jesus Christ, and an heir of Heaven? His manner and appearance, whatever they may be, have not effaced one of those sacred marks which he received in baptism; he is still united to you with the same heavenly and sacred bands which then united you together; and these bands ought to make him appear respectable in your eyes. The precept of brotherly love is not to be fulfilled without pain and labour. Indeed what necessity would there have been of any command at all on the subject, if nothing more were required of you than to love those whom nature and inclination prompted you to love? Such a command would have been nugatory; for nature itself induces you to love them. The existence of the precept, therefore, implies a real difficulty in the performance of it; and this difficulty is the overcoming the repugnances and antipathies which nature sometimes feels against certain individuals. Our Lord foresaw the difficulty, and on account of it has affixed the greatest merit to the observance of this one point; and has declared that he who loves has fulfilled the whole law. Aversions, therefore, instead of justifying the violation of the precept, determine the obligation of its observance, and apply the duty personally to yourselves.

Moreover, the Christian is obliged to regulate his conduct, not according to the caprices of humour and fancy, but according to the principles of reason and religion. The gospel enjoins you to deny yourselves, and resist the inclinations of corrupt nature; and can it be supposed that these inclinations will authorize the infringement of its ordinances? Were repugnance to any particular duty sufficient to remove the obligation of fulfilling it, there is not a single point of the law that would be obligatory; you would be exempt from every duty, and the greater your repugnance happened to be, the more you would be justified, and the more conspicuous your innocence would be. But, my beloved, the law is not made to depend on the likes and dislikes of men; it is intended to repress the inclinations of nature; not to cherish and support them. Even the world, corrupt as it is, despises and ridicules the man who is guided in his actions and opinions, in his hatred and love, by the rules of a fantastical caprice; and is the gospel to be more indulgent on this head—the gospel which enforces the perpetual renunciation

of self-will, and the uninterrupted mortification of our vices and concupiscences?

No, my beloved; your aversions are not to be justified by such pleas as these. But let us take things in another point of view. You say that such or such a person is disagreeable in his manners, and that you cannot endure him. I allow it: but do you suppose that there is nothing offensive in your conduct, and that you are entitled to the love and esteem of all around you? You will not say it. Now, if in your opinion it be reasonable and just that others should excuse your peculiarities, and should consider only the rectitude of your intentions, and the other good qualities on which you pride yourselves; that they should not take offence at trifles, at unintentional improprieties, which it is impossible to be always guarded against; is it not just that you should follow the same rule of equity with respect to them; that you should bear with their imperfections in the same manner that you require that they should bear with yours; and that you should not by your own aversions give them cause to entertain a reciprocal aversion for you?

Were we, however, to examine into the cause, we should perhaps discover that your dislikes originated rather in the peculiarity and inconsistency of your own temper than in any real defects in the character of your neighbour. This may be ascertained by inquiring whether the same opinion is entertained of him by others; I mean by his relatives, and those who are more intimately acquainted with him. Perhaps, likewise, it might be discovered that your dislikes originate in envy. Envy is a subtle vice, and seldom presents itself before your eyes in full view; it is composed of the very dregs of meanness, and therefore conceals itself from inspection. But this may be ascertained by looking into your own hearts, and examining whether the objects of your aversion were not formerly in an inferior station, or upon a level with yourselves, and have risen by degrees to a state of eminence superior to that which you have been enabled to attain.

Perhaps, however, you will say that, let the cause be what it will, the weakness of your nature is as you have described it, and that there is no accounting for humours and dispositions. This may be true to a certain degree; but there is a love which takes its rise in reason and religion, which ought to gain the ascendency over nature. The gospel does not require that you love the *manners* or the *persons* of your neighbours; but it requires that you love *them;* or, in other words, that you respect them as brethren of Jesus Christ,

that you bear with them, that you excuse their weaknesses, that you throw a veil over their defects, that you be kind and compassionate to them, and, finally, that you behave to them in every respect as you require them to behave to you. This is true charity—this is the charity that will continue for ever.

2. But let us proceed to the second pretext by which you attempt to justify your hatreds and dislikes. You say that such or such a person has exerted his utmost endeavours to ruin you; that his daily study is how to involve you in fresh difficulties; that he delights in your sufferings and grievances; and that you have no doubt but he would reduce you, if it were in his power, to the most abject state of poverty and want: and how is it possible to entertain any affection or regard for such a determined enemy?

Well, Christian brethren, supposing that this is the truth, and nothing but the truth, can you see any reason why you should increase the evil? Hatred is much more serious in its consequences than all the malevolence of your enemies. The effects of the one are only transient; those of the other, eternal. The one can only deprive you of the perishable things of this world; the other will deprive you of an immortal crown. By entertaining sentiments of hatred, therefore, you only increase your evils; you exercise revenge on yourselves, and incur a guilt which will expose you to the danger of being lost for ever.

Besides, what advantage will you reap from hatred? If the person you complain of has entirely ruined you, will it restore to you all you have lost? Will it improve your condition? You say that, under the pressure of calamity, it is an easement to the mind to upbraid and chastise the author of your distresses. But, my beloved, what kind of easement is this? Hatred is a restless and tormenting passion; and is it from hatred that consolation is to be derived? Revenge is unmanly; revenge will perpetuate your sufferings, and make them eternal; and is it from this source that you look for comfort and ease? Oh! be not deceived by such illusory ideas. You are Christians; adopt therefore the sentiments of Christians, and regulate your conduct accordingly. Religion informs you that these trials are intended to promote your true interests, and that they are sent by an all-wise and an all-merciful Providence. Perhaps if you had been suffered to enjoy an uninterrupted tide of prosperity you would have neglected the service of God; perhaps if your inclinations had not been thwarted, and your patience exposed to trial, your desires would have been increased beyond bounds, your unrestrained corruption would have led you into excesses, and

crimes, and scandals, in the midst of which, perhaps, you would have been surprised by death.

If, therefore, God humbled you on earth in order to exalt you in Heaven; if, with a view to withdraw you from the brink of a precipice on which you were heedlessly playing, he permit one neighbour to injure you in your property, another to supplant you in your schemes of ambition, and another to contradict you in your inclinations and desires, have you any cause to complain? Ah! you ought rather to adore the inscrutable designs of God, and to bless his mercies for ever. You ought to look upon your offending brethren with the eyes of compassion and love, and consider them as the instruments employed by the hand of God for promoting your eternal welfare. Instead of hating them, you ought to supplicate the Father of mercies that the grace of repentance may be given to them, and that none of those may perish who are suffered to contribute to your salvation.

Hatred never exists in the mind that is duly impressed with sentiments of religion. Were you sincerely convinced that all that passes with time is no better than smoke which is scattered by the wind, that salvation is your great, your only concern, and that the only treasures worthy of your ambition are the riches of eternity, into which you will quickly be constrained to enter, you would look down with compassion and astonishment on those unthinking mortals who wrangle, who dispute, who offend their God, who endanger their salvation, on account of their worldly interest. you would compare them to children, whose anger and rage are excited by the loss of mere baubles, and whose animosity and hatred are occasioned by trifles which would raise a smile on the countenance of the man whose reason had attained to a state of maturity.

Yes, my beloved, infants can witness, without dismay and without sorrow, the loss of their inheritance, and the ruin of their families; but the loss of their infantile toys is more than they can endure: their indignation is instantly roused by an invasion on this species of property; and their tranquillity is not regained until the objects of their fond attachment be restored to them. It is the same with men: they can witness the loss of their heavenly inheritance without emotion; they can forfeit their right to the eternal possessions which Jesus has purchased for them without regret; they can suffer the kingdom of God and the treasures of immortality to slip out of their hands without attempting to prevent it; but no sooner is an attack made on their temporal property, no sooner are they deprived of their play-things

(for temporal things deserve no better name, when compared with the things of eternity,) than their indignation is roused, than an attack is made on the daring invader of their rights, and violence and rage, and hatred and revenge, are instantly set at work to regain the possession of them. Oh! my friends, such inconsistent conduct is unworthy of the man and of the Christian.

3. But, perhaps, you will say, that your neighbour has deprived you, or endeavoured to deprive you, of something that is more valuable than temporal possessions: that he has spoken against you in public and in private; that he has added calumny to detraction, and laid crimes to your charge which you never committed: that he is inveterate in his malice, and that he employs every means to make you appear odious and contemptible in the eyes of your friends. These undoubtedly are injuries of the most serious kind. But before I prove that they are insufficient motives for hatred and animosity, let me caution you against giving full credit to the reports which you have heard. The tale, perhaps, when related by your supposed adversary was devoid of malice, and incapable of injuring your reputation, and owes its present malignity to the tongues of men who have embellished and exaggerated it on purpose to spread dissension and widen the breach between you. Such a thing is not uncommon.

Allowing, however, that the calumny in all its malignity originated with your neighbour, perhaps it may be found on examination that you were in part the cause of it: that you had calumniated him, published his faults and imperfections, and irritated him to retort upon you the shafts of defamation and scandal. If so, you have very little reason to complain, and much less to give way to animosity and hatred. But we will suppose that nothing of all this can be laid to your charge; and on this supposition I will ask, whether you will receive any advantage from the vice of hatred? Will it re-establish your reputation? Will it refute the calumny? Will it not rather draw down upon you evils of a far more pernicious tendency, and expose you to the danger of being for ever miserable? Were you desirous of regaining your lost honour, the only proper means to be adopted would be, to show forth the improbability of the reports by the purity and regularity of your moral conduct. Piety and silence would soon triumph over the malice of your enemy; would soon convince the world of your innocence, and overwhelm your calumniator with shame and confusion. But to return evil for evil, to return hatred for detraction, is the revenge

only of the weak, the wretched consolation of the guilty, and the resource of those only who cannot seek protection in holiness and virtue.

But let us come nearer to the point: let us open the book of the gospels, and examine into the doctrine of Truth itself on this subject. There it is that you are commanded to love those who persecute and calumniate you; to pray for those who hate you; to supplicate the Father of Mercies in behalf of your most inveterate enemies, and to entreat that he would change their hearts, that he would instil into their minds sentiments of peace and charity, and that he would adopt them into the number of his elect. There it is that you are exhorted to mutual charity and forgiveness, by the consideration that you are all brethren of the same hope of your calling; that you were all created for the purpose of being united together in the bosom of the Divinity, and of celebrating in one universal concert his praises and mercies for ever. There it is that you learn that injuries are real blessings, that they are due to you on account of the many sins which you have committed; and that the patient endurance of them will entitle you to the possession of the kingdom of Heaven, which is promised to those who suffer persecution for justice sake.

Self-love alone will induce you to love those who love you, who flatter you, and who sound forth your praises before others. But this, according to the words of our Saviour, is no more than what the heathens do. The gospel requires more, it requries that you love those who hate and calumniate you: it declares, that on this condition alone the mercies of God will be extended to you; and that forgiveness is only to be hoped for from him, in proportion as you forgive one another.

In fact, my beloved, with what appearance of reason can you expect that God will forget the sinful abominations of your past life, and that he will neglect the interests of his own honour and glory, which you have so frequently and so grievously injured, if you at the same time assume the air of unrelenting justice before your brethren, and exact the last farthing of every debt which they have contracted with you? You probably enjoy a reputation to which you are not entitled; you probably would be disgraced for ever in the opinion of men, were the true state of your souls open to their inspection; and it is unreasonable to expect forgiveness of the unmerited insults which you have offered to the Lord of Glory at the time that you refuse on your part to pardon the trivial, the merited injuries, which you have received from your fellow-creatures.

No, my beloved, do not flatter yourselves with the expectation of any such blessings. You are indebted to the Lord the immense sum of ten thousand talents; and the only means of obtaining the discharge of this debt is to remit the hundred pence which are owing to you; or, in other words, the innumerable offences which you have committed against God will never be forgiven, unless you love your enemies, unless you forgive all injuries and affronts, and unless you are in peace and charity with all the world. This is the great precept of fraternal love; be faithful in the observance of it, and then you may reasonably hope for that mercy from God which is promised to the merciful.

LXI.—TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FALSE RECONCILIATIONS.

"Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."—*Matt.*, xxii, 21.

Were I to enter into an investigation of all the duties which are enjoined by our Saviour in the words of my text, I should have to investigate all the duties—moral, civil, and religious, which the Christian at any time is bound to perform: for in these few words they are all contained: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." But instead of entering into a long enumeration of duties, which would be neither instructive nor entertaining, I will call your attention to one of the principal duties of a Christian, and from the words of my text will prove the necessity of complying with it; I mean the forgiveness of injuries, the same that occupied your attention last Sunday. I have already exposed the futility of the pretexts by which so many endeavour to justify the violation of this precept; I will now state the nature and the extent of the obligation, and caution you against those false reconciliations which we too frequently witness, and by which many are deceived to their eternal ruin.

1. There is not one point of the Christian law that is expressed in plainer terms than the precept of loving our neighbour; and yet there is not one that is more abused, less understood, or more violently wrested from its natural meaning, than this same precept. In fact, it is usual for almost every one to say that he has forgiven his brother from his

heart, and that he has nothing to reproach himself with on that head; and yet a sincere and perfect reconciliation is one of those extraordinary events which are seldom witnessed. This may be proved by examining the motives on which reconciliations are founded, the means by which they are effected, and the subsequent deportment of the parties with respect to each other.

First—As to the motives on which they are founded. To form a perfect and sincere reconciliation, it is necessary that the parties should be actuated by charity, and that they should entertain a Christian respect and love for each other. Now, if we examine the motives on which reconciliations are generally founded, we shall discover that Christian charity never enters into the account, and that the motives are mere human motives, referring solely to our satisfaction and interest in this world. Sometimes discordant brethren are induced to consent to a reconciliation at the request of friends; at other times, in order to avoid consequences of a disagreeable nature which would result from open hostility; and at other times again, that they may not be excluded from certain assemblies which are frequented by both parties, and which would be rendered uncomfortable by the presence of men who are declared enemies to each other. Sometimes a reconciliation is effected with a view to acquire the reputation of being men of principle and moderation; and at other times to silence the adverse parties, whose former intimacy, and whose perfect acquaintance with each other's character and plans, render it dangerous to provoke mutual resentment.

These are the ordinary motives on which reconciliations are founded; and that these motives have no connection with true charity is obvious. Indeed, how is it possible that men, whose piety is superficial, and who have not sufficient resolution to submit to the most trifling self-denials of the gospel, should be capable of performing this, the most sublime and the most difficult point in the whole code of Christian morality? No; were we admitted into the secret recesses of their souls, we should see that their reconciliation is purely external; that they still retain a sense of the injuries they have sustained; that their hearts are not changed; and that they are as much estranged from the sentiments of true love and charity as they were before.

2. Let us now look into the means by which these reconciliations are effected. In general the parties themselves do not proceed alone in the business; the interference, not of charity, for the voice of charity is not listened to, but the interference of friends is necessary. This interference is

attended with the greatest difficulties. The wisest precautions are to be adopted; the nicest discriminations are to be made; interests are to be reconciled, obstacles to be removed, and formalities to be observed. Now, are these the workings of charity? Would mediators be required if hatred were entirely banished from the breast, and Christian love existed between the parties? Conditions likewise are exacted; the aggressor must make his advances, must express sorrow for the past, and must meet his adversary at least half way. Now charity is a stranger to all these niceties; it has only one rule, and that is, to forget the injury, and to love the offending party with a fraternal love.

Sometimes, I will allow, it may be proper to proceed with cautious prudence; because it is not impossible that a precipitate or ill-timed attempt to be reconciled may fail of success. But these measures must be suggested by charity, and not by vanity; and therefore I again repeat, that those reconciliations which are brought about with so much difficulty, and are attended with so many restrictions and conditions, are not to be depended on; and that there is too much reason to believe that the crime of hatred still subsists, although the scandal of avowed enmity is done away. Our Lord says: "Go and be reconciled to thy brother."—*Matt.*, v, 24. He does not say: be not too forward in your advance, lest your adversary take advantage of it: do no solicit a reconciliation too earnestly, lest it be considered as a tacit avowal of the justice of his cause, and a condemnation of your own: but he simply says: "Go and be reconciled to thy brother." It is his will that charity alone should effect the reconciliation: he supposes that mediators are not required as an inducement to love your brethren.

3. Examine yourselves, my brethren, on these subjects. You have probably been at variance with some one or other of your fellow-creatures: see whether your reconciliation has been effected by charity or not: it is worth the trouble of inquiry. Perhaps the truth would be more readily investigated, were you to examine into the mode of conduct which you have followed in respect to your neighbour subsequently to your reconciliation. What then has this been? Did you, after you said that you forgave him from your heart, did you form the resolution to avoid his company, and to have no further communication with him; and have you adhered to this resolution? If this has been your conduct, it is in vain that you attempt to delude yourselves with the supposition that you have fulfilled the precept of charity, and that you have done all that a good Christian is bound to do. Your

reconciliation is imperfect: you have not forgiven your brother; and you yet remain in the state of hatred, of sin, and of death.

For, my Christian friends, is it possible to entertain an aversion for a person whom you really love? If you have embraced your enemy as your brother in Jesus Christ, is it possible that the very sight of him can be offensive to you? Perhaps you will say that your refusal to see him is nothing more than a measure of prudence; that you will probably not be able to contain yourself within the bounds of moderation in his presence; and that, consequently, to break off entirely is the only means of avoiding disagreements in future. But what kind of forgiveness is this? Do you think that if you had been truly reconciled with him, his presence alone would have been sufficient to awaken your former resentment, and rekindle your passions? You perhaps have renounced the desire of revenge, and would not, on any account, injure or insult him: but this alone is not Christian forgiveness: the gospel enjoins you to love him, and to show forth your love by treating him as a friend and a brother.

In fact, would you consent that God should love you on the same conditions of never seeing you? Would you say that his goodness and mercy had been extended to you according to your wishes, were he to exclude you for ever from his presence? It is impossible, my beloved, to give a more unequivocal testimony of determined hatred than this. When the passion is confined within more moderate bounds, it is frequently concealed in the heart, and no neglect of the external duties of society is suffered to take place. But when the presence of the offending party cannot be endured, the passion is extended beyond all bounds; and can you pretend to maintain that you are at peace with all men? You exhibit marks of the most inveterate ill-will; and can you pretend that you are guided only by the dictates of true Christian love?

Moreover, as Christians, we are all united together by the most sacred bands. We are members of the same body, children of the same Father, disciples of the same Master, heirs of the same kingdom. We were regenerated in the same baptism, bought with the same price. The religion we profess is a holy society, in which is a reciprocal communication of prayers, of offerings, of merits, and of works. Every duty reminds us that our neighbours and ourselves constitute, as it were, one family, one body, one heart, and one soul. And can it be supposed that you love your neighbour, and

that you are united to him in the bands of Christian union at the time that you have broken the bands of society, and refuse to have any communication with him?

As Christians, likewise, we are united together by the bands of hope. We desire, and we pray, that we may all meet together in happiness hereafter, that we may rejoice in each other's felicity, and that we may sing together in concert the praises of the Divinity in eternal love. And are you united with your neighbour in these bands of hope at the time that you cannot endure his presence? No, my beloved, it is impossible. Be not therefore deceived; for, depend upon it, as long as you entertain this aversion to your neighbour, so long are you guilty of the crime of hatred, and so long do you close the fountain of God's mercies against yourselves.

Perhaps you will say, that, since the laws of charity are so particular in this point, you will offer violence to yourselves, and live upon the same terms of civility and decorum with your neighbour as you did formerly; but that he must never expect to regain the same place in your confidence and affection.

This is certainly advancing a step further; but this is not true charity: this is not loving your neighbour as yourselves. The charity which the gospel enjoins is centred in the heart: it is something more than a love which is manifested only exteriorly; it is a real and effective love, a sincere regard for the object beloved, ready to prove itself by works: it obliterates the recollection of past injuries, and removes every symptom of animosity both from the mind and heart. This ought to be your charity; for this alone is Christian charity.

To observe the outward forms of civility towards an offending neighbour, and to be ready to come forward to his assistance in times of danger or want, is no more than what the world and the laws of society require from you. But the law of God requires that you love him; and as long as your affections are alienated from him, the observance of all other laws will not avail you to salvation. You neglect the most essential point of Christian morality, and are followers of the gospel only in name.

If mankind were united together by no other bands than the external bands of society, then nothing more would be required of you than to perform the duties of society, and to keep up that external intercourse of good offices, of politeness and civility among one another, on which the harmony and the existence of society depend. But there are other bands of a more sacred nature—the bands of faith, of hope, of

charity, and of piety. With these we are united together and form, as it were, a holy and internal society, totally distinct from the civil and external society which legislators have established. If, therefore, you do nothing more than maintain a social intercourse with your adversary, you indeed fulfil the duties of civil society, but you neglect those of religion: you do not disturb the peace of the world, but you overturn the order of charity: you are good subjects of the state, but you are not subjects of the Heavenly Sion; you are men of this world, but you are not men of the world to come: you do all that is required of you by the state, but you do nothing in the sight of God, because you are destitute of true charity. Do not, therefore, be led astray by the erroneous supposition that, if you refrain from exhibiting any external symptoms of hatred against your neighbour, you fulfil the laws of the gospel: for, if the gospel required nothing more, its ordinances would be nugatory and vain; they would exact nothing real, nothing substantial, nothing that would affect the heart; and the grand precept of charity, which alone stamps a value on our actions, would be nothing more than a deceitful pretence, a mere act of hypocrisy.

But why all these arguments to prove that such reconciliations as I have described are imperfect? Interrogate your own hearts—you, I mean, who either shun the society of an offending brother, or who confine your charity to mere external civilities—interrogate your hearts, I say, and they will tell you that you do not love them, that you are not properly reconciled with them, and that, in fact, you entertain as great an adversion for them as ever. Interrogate your friends, your acquaintance, the world at large, and they will all tell you, that in their opinion, you are as much at variance with your neighbour in the dispositions of your hearts as you were before, and that your reconciliation extends no farther than to external ceremony. This is the language of the world; this is the language of your own hearts; this is the language of the gospel, of charity, and of truth: and can you refuse assent to such testimonies as these?

Ah! seldom indeed is there a perfect reconciliation in heart and mind! Dissensions, it is true, are frequently terminated; but seldom is there a termination of ill-will and dislike: the parties, perhaps, may again associate together, but seldom is there a reunion of hearts: they, perhaps, may mutually forgive the offence, but seldom do they cordially love the offender: they, perhaps, may desist from treating each other as enemies, but seldom do they embrace each other as brethren and as members of the same body. Examples of such false

reconciliations as these, are too common in the lower as well as in the higher classes of society, in the walks of virtue as well as in the shades of vice. But, I will again repeat, that unless you forgive your brother from your hearts, you never will obtain the forgiveness of your own offences from the Father of mercies, and never will be admitted into the number of his friends either here or hereafter. Although you may frequent the sacraments; although you may be attentive to the duties of humanity, and be exemplary in every other respect, it will profit you nothing. Although you were to have the gift of prophecy; although you were to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; although you had faith sufficient to remove mountains; although you were to distribute your goods to the poor, and deliver your body to be burned, and did not at the same time possess charity, it would all profit you nothing. (1 *Cor.*, xiii.)

This, perhaps, you may say is a hard saying; and who can bear it? Were I to attempt to extort the good will of all my adversaries, and insist on their friendship, I should be treated with contempt, and probably fail in the end: my nature, moreover, is such, that although I can forgive the injuries I receive, I cannot love the men who wantonly or maliciously inflict them. To the first I reply, that you are disciples of Jesus, and not of the world: that you are not to be influenced in your attempts to effect a reconciliation by any thing that the world will think or say; but that you are to adhere strictly to the injunction of our Lord: "Go, and be reconciled to thy brother:" these are his words, and "his words shall not pass away." If, indeed, your neighbour obstinately refuses to enter into an accommodation, then the fault is not imputable to you; if you forgive him from your hearts, and love him as yourselves, you fulfil the law, and save your own souls.

With respect to the second objection, I candidly acknowledge that it is a hard saying, and that it is contrary to the feelings of flesh and blood. But there are other precepts of the gospel which are equally repugnant to nature, and are yet obligatory: to take up your cross, to deny yourselves, and to be humble of heart, are precepts as difficult to be complied with as is that of loving your enemies, and yet the observance of them is imposed on every Christian without exception. The truth is, we must offer violence to nature; for "the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent only bear it away." Difficulty is no plea for exemption: nature must yield to grace, and charity must reign triumphant in your souls.

Great God! thou alone canst heal the wounds which hatred has occasioned in my soul. Enable me by the powerful influence of thy grace to pardon the trivial injuries which I have received from the hands of my fellow-creatures, that thou mayest be induced to pardon the multiplied transgressions which I have committed against thee.

Is it consistent that I, whose only security is in thy goodness and mercy, should be indignant at the smallest offence, and pursue the offender with relentless severity? Is there any comparison between the injuries which I have received, and those which I have so frequently offered to thy Sovereign Majesty?

No, it is not for a worm of the earth to exalt itself, and show forth its resentment on every occasion; and at the same time to expect that thou—the Lord of all, shouldst humble thyself, and pass over unnoticed its crimes and rebellions against thee?

What reason have I to be so tenacious of my reputation with men? In thy sight, O God! I am worthy only of contempt and ignominy; on account of my disgraceful defilements I have no right or title to the esteem or love of any creature whatsoever; and unless thou neglectest the interest of thy own glory, I have no hope of salvation hereafter.

I will, therefore, for the time to come, pardon every injury, every affront, and I will love my friends in thee, and my enemies for thee; and since thou hast promised to show mercy to those who have shown mercy, and to remit the sins of those who forgive the offences committed against them, I will rely on the accomplishment of this thy promise, and look forward with hope to the participation of those eternal mercies which thou hast in store for those who are truly merciful.

LXII.—TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON FINAL IMPENITENCE.

"Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction..who mind earthly things."—*Phil.*, iii, 18, 19.

Terrible, my Christian brethren, is the solemn sentence contained in the words of this text which is pronounced on

those *who mind earthly things*, and who do not walk in the paths of justice and sanctity. Their *end is destruction.* No consoling prospect is held out to them of mercy and reconciliation in their last moments; no hope is given that the tears and supplications which the terrifying approach of eternity will force from them on the bed of death, will ascend before his throne and disarm his justice. No; their *end is destruction.*

Where, then, perhaps, you will say, is the infinite treasure of the mercies of God? Has he not declared that he willeth not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live? This, undoubtedly, is his declaration, and his word will not fall away. But he has nowhere declared that he will show mercy to the dying sinner; on the contrary, he has declared that he will laugh in the destruction of those who have despised his counsels and neglected his reprehensions; and will mock when that which they fear shall come upon them. These are they of whom it is written: "they shall call upon me, and I will not hear,"—*Prov.*, i, 2; "they shall seek me, and shall die in their sins."—*John*, viii, 21. It is impossible to listen to the awful menace of a sentence like this, coming as it does from the mouth of Truth itself, without a shuddering sense of the great danger which attends every wilful deviation from the path of righteousness. Unless we live as we desire to die; unless we take off our affections from worldly things, and walk in the paths of holiness during the days of our strength, our end will be destruction; our tears and supplications on the bed of death will avail us nothing; the Lord will not hear, and we shall die in our sins. It will not be so necessary to solicit your attention while I discuss this awful subject, as to moderate your fears; I will, therefore, with the most tender circumspection, explain the reasons on the part of God why the repentance of the dying sinner is rejected.

1. It is an incontestible truth that the Lord fixes limits to his patience, and that he seldom proceeds beyond them. In the treasures of his infinite mercies there is an appointed number of special favours destined for each individual: this number being received, and the effects frustrated by repeated crimes, the wrath of God is the immediate consequence; and the unhappy soul who has neglected to profit by them, receives only the ordinary supplies of grace, with which it rarely happens that men are disposed to correspond in such a manner as to secure their eternal salvation.

The whole time of life, I acknowledge, is a time of mercy and salvation: we have it always in our power to return to God: at whatsoever time the sinner is converted from the

error of his ways the Lord will show him mercy; and no wound is incurable as long as we can fix our eyes on the brazen serpent; that is, as long as the merits of our crucified Jesus are applicable to our souls. This, to be sure, is an undoubted truth. But neither is it to be doubted that every special grace which we abuse may, for aught we know, be the last we are destined to receive; that the forbearance of God often gives way to his wrath; that the limits of his divine bounty are not extended to all alike: and that it will sometimes happen that a single transgression is capable of bringing down the sentence of reprobation on the head of the unhappy prevaricator; we know that he is "terrible in his counsels over the sons of men."—*Ps.*, lxv, 5; and that no one "knoweth the power of his anger, and for his fear can number his wrath."—*Ps.*, lxxxix, 11.

This is undeniable, for it is founded on the authority of Truth itself. If, therefore, the scriptures uniformly testify that God sometimes withdraws himself from the obstinate sinner, and that, after having to no purpose opened the treasures of his mercies to him, he delivers him up to the error of his ways, at what period of life would this severity on the part of God be just and equitable, if not at the hour of death? He sometimes abandons the soul after the neglect of a few inspirations; and will he fly to the relief of the sinner who has spent his whole life in the flagrant abuse of all his graces and blessings, and that even at the very moment which he had marked out for the time of vengeance? Ah! where would be that inscrutable and unerring attribute of the Deity, which steeps its arrows in the blood of the impious, and which is not to be moved by the tears and supplications of his enemies in their affliction? What would become of those terrible threats, which are so often denounced in the scriptures, and which cannot fail of their effect? When would the sinner be dealt with according to his works if the hour of death was to be the hour of mercy and reconciliation? Would the patience and forbearance with which God endures the repeated insults of the sinner through life be so terrible as the scriptures declare were it to be terminated by a general act of pardon and oblivion? Would he be justly accounted severe, and most to be dreaded when he is slow to punish, if it were not in the order of his justice to execute judgment, and to inflict his vengeance once for all at the close of life?

Allowing, however, that the justice of God may not be so inexorable, and that mercy may be extended to the dying sinner without any injury to this attribute; nevertheless, the

grace of reconciliation at that critical time is of so extraordinary a nature that no sinner can entertain any reasonable hopes of being favoured with it. It is a grace which is not only to change his heart and convert him to the Lord, but which is to effect his justification, to establish him in a state of holiness, and to cause him to persevere even unto the end. And what a grace, my beloved, is this! It is a grace that is reserved only for the elect; it is the greatest of all the gifts of God: it is the consummation of all graces: it is the last effort of love which God exerts in favour of his faithful servants: it is the fruit of a whole life of piety and holiness: it is a crown prepared for those only who have fought valiantly and conquered. According to the rules of strict justice it is a gift which God is not bound to impart to any one: he has sometimes refused it to men who, for a great length of time, had walked in the paths of holiness and justice; and the deplorable end of Solomon is an example which, in every age, has struck terror into the heart of the pious and faithful Christian. And can the sinner presume on receiving this most signal of all blessings at the hour of death, after having rejected every other blessing during life? Can he flatter himself that he, who has been favoured with so many graces, and has abused them all, will be favoured with a grace which is not always given to those who have long been faithful? Can he entertain the thought that God will enrich his soul with the choicest gifts, because he returns to him at a time when he can sin no longer? My God! what an unfounded hope is this! how astonishing is it that it should delude such a great proportion of the Christian world! The men who crucify their flesh with its vices and concupiscences, that they may insure to themselves the possession of this inestimable gift tremble incessantly at the thought of the uncertainty whether it will be granted to them or not: sinners rely with confidence on receiving it, and instead of taking any precaution for insuring to themselves the possession of it, are industriously labouring to increase the treasure of wrath which is already heaped up against them. Is this being actuated by principles of sound reason?

Supposing that God sometimes granted this invaluable gift to the sinner who had hitherto deferred his conversion, he certainly will not grant it to you, my brethren, if you defer your conversion with a view of making your peace with him on your death-bed. It may happen that the man on whom the Lord has bestowed few extraordinary graces in life, and who has never entered sufficiently into himself to behold the irregularity of his conduct, and to perceive the opposition that

there was between his ways and the ways of the gospel; it may happen, I say, that such a man may open his eyes on the bed of death, and struck with astonishment and grief at the view of his past crimes, may lift up his supplicating hands to Heaven, and with his eyes bathed in tears, and his heart overflowing with the purest sentiments of grief, may solicit grace and find pardon.

The Lord may look down from his seat of mercy with compassion on the lost sheep which has then only discovered the error of his ways, and is desirous of returning immediately to the fold. But to the man who has received every favour from God, who has been always convinced of the enormity of his crimes, who has been always tormented by the stings of confusion and remorse, who has been incessantly importuned by the interior inspirations of God to forsake his evil ways, and has hitherto resisted them all, on the supposition that grace would be offered, and that it would be time enough to correspond with it on the bed of death, to such a man the grace of a perfect reconciliation is never granted. It is idle and impious for any man to flatter himself that he will be an exception to the general rule, and be treated with more mercy than others; this hope is criminal in itself, and will assuredly draw down upon him the judgments that he feared. Ah! there is scarcely a man living who does not a thousand times over form a resolution of forsaking his iniquities; and of the multitude of those who propose to do this, how rarely do we meet with an instance of one who is not cut off before he has the resolution to execute it? We all, like Balaam, desire to die the death of the just; but there are very few who desire to walk in their footsteps during life.

But, perhaps, you will say, that many sinners, after a life spent in debauchery, and in the continual abuses of the graces of Heaven, exhibit such extraordinary signs of repentance on their death-bed, that a reasonable hope may be entertained that the Lord was moved by their tears, and their sorrow was sufficiently intense to efface their former guilt. This is an error which too frequently inspires impenitent sinners with a fatal confidence. But it is of such men as these that the Lord speaks when he says, they shall seek me, but they shall not find me; or, in other words, these external signs of repentance I will not regard; they shall seek me, but they shall die in their sins.

2. This, my beloved, is a most alarming truth: it deprives the impenitent sinner of every hope of mercy. When I reflect on this; when I behold, on one side, the dying sinner lifting up his supplicating hands to his offended God, and, on

the other, an avenging Deity turning away from him in wrath, and relentlessly shutting his ears to his agonizing cries; then it is that God appears to be that great—that independent Being, who has no need of man. I place before my eyes the severity of his judgments, and a chilling horror pervades my whole frame. But how terrible soever his ways may appear to us, in Him, who hath truth and judgment, rely upon it, they are just and necessary.

I do not mean to insinuate that a single moment of true repentance would not be sufficient to efface the sins of a whole life: I know that God will never reject a contrite and humble heart. But the repentance of the dying sinner is rejected by him because it is not sincere. In the first place, it is not sincere, because it is not voluntary: it is caused merely by the prospect of approaching death. Were his days to be prolonged, he would return to his former ways. Had he received a positive assurance that his illness would not end in death, he would not be so solicitous to avert the indignation of Heaven. Ah! as long as the danger was not apparent, he thought little of his sins; and he thought less of atoning for them by works of penance. And is it not evident from hence that his grief is occasioned by the love of life, and not by the love of God? Is it not evident that he did not intend to embrace the service of God till such time as the world was slipping out of his hands?

Secondly, it is not sincere, because it is nothing more than a natural fear, excited by a view of the grave, and by the near prospect of eternal torments. He weeps; but his tears flow on account of his distress, and not on account of his sins. He prays, not as a child supplicating the forgiveness of an injured and beloved parent, but as a criminal endeavouring to interest the feelings of his judge, and to obtain a respite. He detests his past sins, not on account of the outrage committed against the majesty of God, but on account of the evils which they are about to entail upon himself. His own interest is the only cause of his grief, the only object of his supplications, and the only motive of his repentance. He made little account of the honour and glory of God in the midst of his unlawful pleasures, and he makes as little account of them even in his repentance. Ah! if he were assured that nothing was to be dreaded beyond the grave, and that hell was nothing more than a fable, he would care little about the insults that he had offered to the Almighty. Take away the dread that is upon him, and his sorrow and repentance will soon be at an end; remove his apprehensions, and he will soon dry up his tears.

Ah, my God! thou great Searcher of hearts! if I defer my repentance to that momentous hour, I shall not be able to impose upon thee by deceitful tears. My tears, like those of Esau and Antiochus, will be fruitless and vain. I shall be treated by thee not as a sincere penitent humbly bewailing his disloyalties, but as a criminal trembling at the approach of his execution. Thou wilt perceive that the root of my passions will be even then subsisting in my soul; and I shall be accounted by thee equally as impure, as worldly, as voluptuous, as ambitious and revengeful, as during the days of my health and vigour: my fears will be occasioned by the same dread of suffering which now causes me to shun the least pain and self-denial: my alarms will be increased in proportion to the love which I now feel for ease and enjoyment: and, O just God! can I suppose that you will be moved by tears, which are excited by the same self-love which has been all along the principal cause of my rebellions against thy holy laws?

In this manner will sinners raise their voice to Heaven in the midst of their distress; and a just God "will laugh in their destruction."—*Prov.*, i, 26. They will weep; but his justice "will mock when that is come upon them which they feared."—*ib.* They will strike their breasts; but their hearts will not be softened. They will promise to observe his laws with more fidelity if he restore them again to health; and he will treat their promises with derision, because he well knows that they are not truly reformed, and that the only use they would make of health would be to increase the catalogue of their crimes. They will exhort the sorrowful spectators of their death to take warning by their example, and to serve God in the days of their strength: and he will say to them: "Why dost thou declare my justices, and take my covenant in thy mouth?—*Ps.*, xlix, 16. They will cry to the Lord, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant,"—*Ps.*, cxlii, 2, and he will reply: Thou art "already judged." They will say, O God of mercy and compassion! thou art come to save sinners; and he will answer, "There is no salvation for the impious." They will say, O Saviour of mankind! I place my confidence in the infinite treasures of thy mercies; and he will reply, "The hopes of the sinner shall perish with him." They will say, O divine Shepherd of our souls! thou dost not reject the lost sheep that returns to thee; and he will answer, "There is a time for pardon, and a time for punishment." They will say, O Jesus! I commend my soul into thy hands; and he will reply, thou art none of mine; thy soul I will receive; but I will receive it only for the

purpose of making it the victim of my eternal justice: thy fruitless sighs and unavailing supplications shall be the subject only of my derision and scorn.

What state, my brethren, can be more terrible than this? The minister of the Lord, whose assistance they had rejected in health, but who is now summoned to their bed-side, exhorts them to repentance, although he has little hopes of its efficacy. He describes in the most moving terms the mercies of the Lord, although he adores in secret the inscrutable depths of his justice. By every artifice of charity he endeavours to diminish in their eyes the enormity of their crimes, in order to preserve them from despair; but he knows that the Lord has his own weights and measures, and that it is not in the power of mortal man to lessen them. He declares that a sincere repentance, although only of a few moments' duration, will be admitted by God, and be sufficient to insure their salvation; but he knows, at the same time, that this is a miracle of grace, and that it is a hopeless thing when the soul of man has nothing else to depend on.

In conclusion, I will suggest one reflection more to sinners of this description, if there are any (which God forbid) in the number of my present hearers. Is there anything you can desire more favourable at the hour of death, than time and opportunity to look into yourselves, to receive the rites of the Church, and to offer up to God the tears of grief and repentance for the sins of your past lives? Nevertheless (I tremble while I speak it), nevertheless, what hopes does our Saviour allow you to entertain that your prayers and tears will be accepted by him, if you defer your repentance to your death-bed? "You shall seek me, and you shall die in your sins."—*John*, viii, 21. This is his solemn declaration. What, then, must we think of the death of those of our friends and acquaintances, who, after a life of worldly dissipation or criminal excess, gave signs of repentance in their last moments? Will you say that the inveterate sinner, whose fears were excited at that time by the view of the judgments of Heaven, that God gave him grace to die like a Christian; that, although his life was dissipated, his death was most edifying; and that you would esteem it a happiness were you to die in the same manner? I do not pretend to fix limits to the mercies of God. But what foundation have you to presume that he made his peace effectually with God? You may say that he sought Jesus: but did he find him? You may say, that he bathed his feet, like Magdalen, with his tears; but did he hear those consoling words, *thy sins are forgiven thee?* All that I can say is, that the Lord has declared that

they shall seek him, *and shall not find* him, and that *they shall die in their sins.* All that I can say is. that the holy fathers have always spoken of the repentance of dying sinners in terms the most alarming. All that I can say is, that the number of those who are saved is very small; whereas, if the marks of repentance which are given by dying sinners always proceeded from a heart that was truly contrite and truly reformed, almost every sinner would be saved, and the reprobate would be those few only who defied the anger and the judgments of God even to the end. All that I can is, that we must do penance whilst we have health and time; and that on the bed of death we either shall not be able to seek Jesus, or if we do seek him, we shall not find him; and, consequently, that if we defer our repentance till that time, we shall die in our sins; because repentance at that time is almost always impossible; or, at best, so extremely equivocal and defective as to leave little or no hopes of a favourable result. Would to God that these menaces may not be applicable to any one in this assembly; but that every individual may experience in his last moments that death is a passage to a happy immortality.

LXIII.—LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE LAW OF GOD.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."—*Matt.*, xxiv, 35.

It is not uncommon in these days of tepidity and dissipation to call in question the immutability of the law of God, to substitute customs and human traditions in the place of its inviolable ordinances, and to accommodate it to times and circumstances. The doctrine that the gospel will admit of no mitigation, and that the same rigorous discharge of every duty which it enjoins, has been and is required of every Christian in every age and nation, is a doctrine which strikes terror into the hearts of the dissipated and relaxed disciples of Jesus of the present times. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should be controverted, and that men should pretend to discover in the total change of habits, customs, and sentiments which has taken place since the first propagation of the gospel, and likewise in the peculiar circumstances in which they are situated, sufficient reasons to authorize a relaxation of its severity. But, my brethren, the words which I have selected for my text declare that the law of God is unchange-

able, and that although Heaven and earth were entirely to pass away or be dissolved, his word would never pass away.

The mind of man, I allow, is liable to change; every age has its peculiar customs and manners, and these customs and manners influence our conduct. But the law of God is not liable to such vicissitudes; it is the same in all ages and nations, and on that account it ought to be the constant and invariable rule of our actions.

I allow, likewise, that the observance of the law is attended with more or less difficulty, with more or less inconvenience, according to the dispositions of the individual, or the state of life in which he is engaged. But the law is always the same, and applies equally to all; and, on that account, neither difficulty nor inconvenience will justify the violation of it. The investigation of this subject will open a wide field for consideration, and I hope will contribute to awaken you out of that dangerous lethargy in which so many of our brethren pass their days.

1. In the first ages of the Church, the Christian writers remarked that the morality and doctrine of the pagans varied according to times and circumstances. The philosophers, says Tertullian, were not enlightened from above; they were influenced by the corruption of their own hearts, and in their determination of good and evil were left to the weakness and blindness of their imaginations. Having, therefore, no fixed and solid foundation on which to build their system of religious truth, they were liable to error; and it is not surprising that their moral code was subject to change, and that their doctrines were accommodated to the times, instead of the times being reformed by their doctrines.

But, continues the same author, truth is always essentially the same; its immutability is derived from the immutability of God himself; his wisdom, his sanctity, and his justice, form the basis on which its moral code is founded, and it is not in the power of man to expunge or to soften down the least tittle of it.

Now it is truly astonishing that Christians who have received this eternal law, and acknowledge that their conduct must be regulated by it, should pretend that it is subject to change like the doctrines of the ancient philosophers, and that the rigorous duties which it prescribed in the primitive times, are not of equal force in the present degenerate and corrupted state of mankind.

Let no man who values the interests of his immortal soul, ever think thus. The gospel is unchangeable; although all things change around it, it does not change. The duties

which it prescribes are proportioned to the nature and necessities of man, and are consequently adapted for all ages and nations. It will always be the law to regulate times and customs; and it will not pass away, even when Heaven and earth pass away, and give place to the new Heaven and new earth which are to succeed. Such as it was when the primitive Christians received it at its first promulgation, the same it was when delivered to us; the same it will be when delivered to posterity; and the same it will be when adored and loved by the blessed in the mansions of eternal happiness. The fervour or the tepidity of its followers can neither add to nor diminish any thing from its mildness or its rigour; the zeal or condescension of any man can neither make them more austere or more easy. It is that eternal gospel which the angel in the apocalypse announces from the highest heavens to all nations and to all tongues. (*Rev.* xiv, 6).

Nevertheless, when we describe to you in the conduct of the first disciples of the faith an exact representation of the fulfilment of the gospel duties, and from the description of their retired and mortified life, their hatred of the world, their assiduity at the public service of God in his temple, their charity and brotherly love, their contempt of all that passes with time, and their ardent longings to be united to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their hope; when, I say, from the description of these things, we endeavour to convey a just idea of the dissimilarity there is between your manners and theirs, and to prove that you are so far removed from the kingdom of God; instead of being alarmed and terrified at the view of a dissimilarity, which is so great that an unbeliever would not imagine that you were disciples of the same Jesus, or followers of the same gospel, you censure our importunities, and say that it is to no purpose to talk of former times; that we must take mankind as they are; that primitive fervour and primitive morals have suffered too great a diminution ever to be restored; and that to hold out the necessity of living as they did, is, in fact, to declare that salvation is no longer attainable by the present race of men.

But, my beloved, what is your object in this reply? Is it to prove that, in proportion as times and ages have diminished the purity of the Christian world, the purity of the gospel has diminished also; that its laws have become milder and more indulgent to the passions, in proportion as the passions themselves are become more headstrong; and that the decay of morality has mitigated the precepts of Jesus? If this is your meaning, you are most wofully mistaken. When our

Lord foretold in the gospel, that in the latter times—the times in which we unfortunately live, faith would hardly be found on the earth; that his name would almost be forgotten; that his precepts would be incompatible with the prevaling maxims and customs; that the just themselves would be in danger of contracting defilement from the prevailing contagion, and of being carried away by the torrent of bad example; he did not say that, in order to accommodate himself to the corruption of these times, he would remit something of the severity of his gospel; that he would acknowledge the expediency of substituting the customs which ignorance and depravity would establish in the place of the rules and maxims of the law; that he would exact infinitely less from his disciples than what he exacted from the first Christians; and that his kingdom, which he promised only to the violent, should then be gained by the indolent and slothful.

On the contrary, he admonished his apostles, that in these latter times it would be more necessary than ever to watch, to pray, to fast, to flee to the mountains in order to avoid the general corruption: he repeated his admonition: "Watch ye, therefore, praying all times, lest any of those things come upon you that are to happen."—*Luke*, xxi, 36.

In fact, my beloved, it is consonant with reason that our piety should be the more fervent and attentive in proportion as iniquity is known to gain ground; that we should apply more constantly to prayer and good works, in proportion as we are surrounded by dangers. The degeneracy of mankind, therefore, imposes additional obligations on us; and salvation, instead of being attained with more ease, is attained with more difficulty now than it was in former ages.

In the second place, can it be said that the rigorous precepts of the gospel, the maxims of self-denial, of patient suffering, of contempt of the world, of humility, of charity, were to be enforced only in the primitive times? Can it be supposed that the austere doctrine of Jesus was intended only for those chaste, those innocent, those fervent and pious souls, who sacrificed riches, honours, pleasures, friends, relatives, and everything else for the love of their Master; and who not unfrequently preserved the grace which they received in baptism without spot or stain until they were summoned to render an account of their works? Can it be supposed that Jesus imposed a heavier yoke on them on account of their zeal and fidelity in his service, and that he reserved his benevolence and indulging forbearance for the times when his service would be neglected, and his precepts despised? Oh! were this the truth, the boasted equity and wisdom of the

Christian code of morality would be lost; more would be required of him who owed less!—the greater the transgressions, the milder the sentence would be of course!—the road to Heaven would be less rugged for the sinner than for the just!—the more that men were in love with vice, the less need would there be of virtue!

Let it not, therefore, be alleged by Christians as a justification of their conduct, that the times are no longer the same: the change of times does not operate a change in the laws of God. Let it not be said as an excuse, that primitive fervour is too far relaxed to be restored; the general restoration of it is not required at your hands; restore it in your own breasts, and you will have fulfilled your whole duty. Let it not be said that Christians formerly were endued with greater strength, or that they were blessed with more powerful graces than Christians of the present times; they were distinguished only from us by their more lively faith, their more intrepid constancy, their more ardent love of Jesus, and their more sincere contempt of the world and its fleeting vanities; these were their only distinctions.

Have not we the same source of grace to apply to as they had? Have not we the same ministry, the same altar, the same victim? Is not the Lord prepared to extend the same mercies to us as to them? Is his arm shortened, or is his love diminished? Ah! we have living proofs of the contrary before our eyes. There are in the midst of us, even in those degenerate times, just men, men of the most pious and exemplary lives, whose fervour, zeal, and love, remind us of the first ages, and demonstrate that the precepts of the gospel may be fulfilled with the same facility and exactness by modern Christians as they were by our pious ancestors. Let it not, therefore, be said, that "former times were better than they are now; for this manner of question is foolish," says the wise man. (*Eccl.*, vii, 11). At no time was it ever pleasing to corrupt nature to follow Jesus; at no time will it cease to be necessary for the Christian to take up his cross, to withdraw his affections from the world, to have his conversation in Heaven, and to live like a stranger on earth. The saints in all ages had the same passions to subdue, the same abuses to avoid, the same dangers to fear, and the same obstacles to surmount, as we ourselves have; and the only difference that exists between them and us is, that they had not only customs and manners to renounce, not only the derisions of the world to despise, but frequently the most cruel tortures to endure. Their profession of the Christian name deprived them of all the comforts and advantages of this world, and caused them

to be a proscribed race, and exposed them to the fury of enraged tyrants and persecutors. They were spectacles both to angels and to men: they were hated by the Jew, and despised by the Gentile: they were the outcasts of the whole world. These were their trials; this was the price which they paid for the kingdom of Heaven. But their faith was not to be shaken; they submitted to all with joy, knowing that the sufferings of this life were not worthy to be compared with the glory which was to be revealed to them.

We, on the other hand, have only to renounce the criminal abuses of the world and to contemn the derisions of the unwise; these are the only exterior trials to which we are exposed, and yet we complain that they are above our strength! No, my beloved, the law of God is unchangeable in its duration; it is the same for all times and for all places; it may be fulfilled by us with as great, perhaps greater facility than it was by the primitive Christians; and consequently there is no excuse, however plausible, that will in the least degree extenuate the crime of those men who wilfully abuse and deliberately transgress it in the sight of God.

In addition to this, the law is immutable in its extent. It acknowledges no exception of persons. It is the same for the rich as for the poor; it imposes the same obligations on king and beggar. The law of Moses was for one nation only; but Jesus is an universal legislator; he came to unite all mankind under one general system of obedience, and out of all states and conditions to form one body animated by the same spirit and governed by the same laws. In vain, therefore, shall we attempt to set up a claim to any exemption; there can be no immunity; either we must withdraw ourselves entirely from the covenant, or be wholly subject to it. Having all of us entered into the same engagements in baptism, it is clear that all of us will have to render the same account.

In fact, my brethren, what are the duties of the gospel? They may be reduced to two heads; to resist and weaken the corrupt inclinations of the flesh; and to perfect in our souls the grace which we received at the sacred font. The first requires that we deny ourselves, that we practise mortifications, and that we renounce the suggestions of self-will; the second is to be completed by prayer, retirement, watchfulness, contempt of the world, and fervent desires of the things above. This is, in substance, the whole of our gospel duties; and can any of them be dispensed with as unnecessary? I maintain that they cannot: unless the rich are strictly atten-

tive to them, they will be overpowered by the allurements of pleasure and by the temptations of the world; they will be intoxicated with vanity, and will be caught in the snares that are laid for them on every side: unless the poor are strictly attentive to them, their spirits will be broken by the hardships of want; their minds will be distracted by solicitude and anxiety; and their thoughts will be entirely taken off from that which alone is capable of imparting consolation to them. In a word, there is no situation in life in which the fulfilment of these duties is not indispensably necessary for salvation.

This is an incontestable truth, founded on the authority of the unerring word of God himself, and therefore it is in vain to seek for pretexts to authorize an exemption from any the least part of them. That we may experience difficulties, that we may meet with some inconveniences, that we may be exposed to dangers, and suffer some loss in our temporal concerns or possessions, is indeed, all very possible; but nothing of all this will justify our departure from the paths of rectitude. We must be ready to pluck out the eye that scandalizeth us, and cut off the hand that offendeth us: we must be ready to make the most painful sacrifices rather than be deficient in our allegiance to the Lord of All. If nature be averse to the practice of the most painful duties, we must fight against nature; we must subdue nature, and reduce it into subjection to the spirit. If the passions are violent, we must be violent in our opposition to them; we must keep up a continual warfare against them, and not desist until we have gained a complete victory. Our great Lawgiver did not pretend to form a system of morality that would be accommodated to the inclinations of flesh and blood: he did not profess to prescribe duties which would not encroach on the passions, and which would not be binding when inconveniences and difficulties might happen to occur: on the contrary, he declared that he came, not to bring peace, but a sword; that he came to "set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."—*Matt.*, x, 35; and that he came to point out to him a path that was rugged and strewed with thorns. This was the object of our Saviour's mission; and can it be supposed that the hardships and labours which were particularly intended to wean our affections from earthly things, are sufficient reasons to exempt us from the obligation of fulfilling the law itself?

Ah! if we examine minutely into the cause of all that opposition which is experienced, and of all those pretexts

which are alleged by worldlings, we shall discover that the passions are the source from which they spring, and we shall be convinced that men would not pursue a line of conduct directly opposite to the gospel, and would not endeavour to justify themselves, notwithstanding the evidence of the law by which they are condemned, were it not that they preferred their ease, their convenience, their interests in this world, before the glory of God and their own salvation.

Let us, my beloved, die to the world and to our passions; that is, let us take off our affections from the perishable things of this world, and open our hearts freely to the communications of Heavenly love, and we shall then acknowledge that the law of God is unchangeable; we shall then be convinced that every duty is practicable; that difficulties are not to be attended to, and that the inconveniences, which before appeared of such importance in our eyes, are nothing more than trials—the inseparable accompaniments of virtue. It is easy to find excuses when the mind is averse to any duty: the passions never want pretexts: self-love will throw a favorable light over every action, and justify the most palpable violations of the law of God. How many are there in the Christian world who pass their lives in this manner, endeavouring to seduce themselves—who adopt every means of obscuring the light of faith; and who eagerly seek after and approve of every argument that authorizes the gratification of the passions! Yes: how many are there, all whose care, and reflection, and talents, and wisdom, and counsel, are employed in forming a bandage for themselves, with which their eyes may be blindfolded, and their danger concealed from their sight until the fatal moment arrives when the most dreadful of all calamities is destined to fall upon them!

May this, my beloved, never be the unhappy lot of any one in this assembly. For this purpose let us walk honestly as in the day, bearing in mind that our only security is in fulfilling all the laws and commandments of God without mitigation or diminution. Then we may reasonably expect that the gospel, after having been the rule of our conduct on earth, will be our eternal consolation in the regions of inexpressible bliss.

LXIV.—ASSUMPTION OF OUR BLESSED LADY.

ON THE FEAST.

"Show me, O thou, whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday."—*Cant.*, i, 6.

This is the language of the just man during his abode upon the earth. At a distance from his beloved, from whom he is separated by the veil of his mortality, and experiencing nothing here below that can satisfy the ardent longings of his soul, but the hope of being speedily united to him; sighing incessantly for the happy moment when the heavens will be opened, and the gates of his beloved be manifested to him in its fullest splendour, he incessantly cries out: "O thou whom my soul loveth, show me where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday."

These desires, I acknowledge, are too frequently weakened by the connection which must necessarily subsist between mortal man and the world. Visible things create in him many attachments, divide his affections and cause him to be in love with his mortal state, even at the time that he is sighing after the good things of the world to come. This total alienation of the affections from creatures, this grief at the long continuance of our exile here below, this joy and delight at the sight of death and the near approach of the dissolution of our mortality, was never, by many degrees, so perfect in any creature purely human as it was in Mary; and consequently she was supereminently entitled, on this day of her triumph, in quality of the true spouse, to hold this language of love: "O thou, whom my soul loveth, show me where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday." A few reflections on the glory which attended the death of the venerable Mother of our Lord Jesus shall form the subject of my address to you on this festival.

1. It is invariably the order of Divine Providence to visit his chosen servants with humiliations and disgraces before men, proportioned to the degree of holiness and justice to which he proposes to raise them. He appears to be, as it were, jealous of the glory of being the sole author of their fidelity: he will not suffer them to shine with any other light than what proceedeth immediately from himself; he is eager to deprive them of the greatness which the world is capable of bestowing, and to reduce them to a condition in which

they become more worthy of that true greatness, which is derived from serving and loving him alone.

The humiliations of Mary during her earthly pilgrimage bear ample testimony to the truth of this observation. The degree of glory and honour to which she was raised was the highest that could possibly be attained by any pure creature; and the path by which she was led to it, was the path of obscurity and reproach. Her titles were supereminently great and glorious: she was descended from the royal stock of David: she was immaculate even in her conception: she was a virgin after she had brought into the world her only begotten Son: she was vested with the supreme dignity of Mother of God—a dignity which reflect an additional splendour on all her other titles, both of nature and grace: and yet not one of these titles was acknowledged and revered by the world during her mortal existence. Her high birth was concealed under the veil of poverty: her extraordinary graces were hidden in the obscurity of a simple and retired life: her elevated dignity, and her august title of Mother of God, were not distinguishable, because there was no visible distinction between her Son and other men: Judea considered her merely as the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, and placed her upon the same level as other matrons of her nation. The world was not informed of the great things which the Lord had wrought in her; she herself did not seek to be exalted in the public esteem: she willingly consented to be deprived of all her glory; she submitted to the privation with joy: not a word escaped from her lips which could betray the secret of her exalted condition: her only desire, her only solicitude was that the glory of her Son should be known, and his kingdom established over the whole earth.

By such degrading and humiliating steps as these, did the wisdom of God prepare this his chosen vessel of grace for the glory to which she was to be raised on this day. Her whole solicitude had been to conceal herself from the eyes of men, and to live without distinction or rank amongst the matrons of Israel; and the solicitude of God seems to have been to raise her to a state of supereminent glory at her death, and to distinguish her from the rest of human kind by such a singular privilege as would proclaim to future ages her august title of Mother of God. Her pure and sacred body, like that of her Son, was not abandoned to corruption: the power of the Father raised it, as is piously believed, from the dead; the Heavens opened to receive her, glorious and triumphant: she ascended from the tomb encircled with rays of the purest light, to take possession of her seat of glory at the right hand

of her Son; she ascended with the same body which had given birth to that glorious flesh which had opened Heaven to all mankind: she was seated above all the principalities and powers. She was the true ark of Israel, says the pious St. Francis of Sales, which, after it had been concealed for a time under tents in the desert, in a state of obscurity, was at length introduced with pomp and solemnity, by the true David, into the Heavenly Jerusalem.

This was the magnificent reward which God had prepared for his chosen servant. She willingly consented that all her excellent gifts and honours should be concealed from the eyes of men during the days of her mortal life: and God exalted her at her death by raising her sacred body from the grave, and placing it at the right hand of the humanity which his only Son had assumed for the salvation of men.

Now, my beloved, let us turn to ourselves, and examine whether we are ready to submit to the humiliations which the providence of God is pleased to send us. Are we content that our good qualities, our talents, our acquirements, our virtues should be concealed from the public eye? Do we not rather endeavour to exhibit ourselves always in the most favourable colours? Is it not our chief study to gain the esteem and approbation of our fellow-creatures? Where is the man who is willing and desirous that the world should be unacquainted with those traits in his character which would raise him in the estimation of the public? Is such a man frequently to be found? Ah! we all seek for honour: we all seek for glory in the sight of men. It is our desire that they should behold, as if stamped on our foreheads, our virtues, our talents, our honours, our learning, and our acquirements: even in our works of piety it too frequently happens that our eyes are secretly directed to the applause of others; else, why seek for distinction—why, in the very sanctuary itself, and at a moment when we come to present ourselves before God, who humbled himself even to the death of the cross—why contend, as many do, for the paltry advantage of rank and precedence over those about us, who with equal, or perhaps superior merit to distinguish them, are not raised by birth or fortune to an equal footing with ourselves?

2. Mary, in addition to the humiliations above described, was constrained, during the whole of her mortal life, to live in a constant state of submission and dependence. At one time she was subject to the will of Joseph; at another, she was dependent on the commands and labours of her Son; at another, she was under the care and authority of the beloved

disciple, and considered him as her master and director. She submitted to this state of obedience and subjection with cheerful tranquillity, as being the path by which the Almighty intended to conduct her to eternal happiness. After the resurrection of our Lord, she followed the disciples without any distinction of rank or preëminence. She, who was blessed above all women, who was ennobled by the highest title that could be given to any pure creature, who was the great support upon earth of the rising Church after the death of her Son, she assumes to herself no authority whatever; she leaves the government of the Church in the hands of its pastors, and reserves to herself no other glory than that of submitting implicity to their decisions. What an example is this! how worthy to be proposed to those haughty and restless Christians, who do not partake of her gifts and endowments, and who will not imitate her submission and obedience.

But on this day Mary takes possession of that power which she sacrificed to the will of the Almighty during her abode on earth: she enters upon all her rights. She is constituted, under Christ, the mediatrix of the faithful, the hope and support of the Church, the refuge of sinners, the protectress of the just, the queen of Heaven and earth. Yes, my beloved; the power of Mary is confined within no other limits than those which the love of her Son has been pleased to fix. He makes her the distributor of his graces; he encourages our addresses to her as a most powerful advocate in our behalf; and has shown on innumerable occasions, that nothing is so opposite to the genuine spirit and pure principles of his religion, as to pretend to uphold the dignity, and increase our veneration for the glorious power of the Son of God, by diminishing that of his holy mother. In honouring her, we honour him. We extol his gifts, when we extol the ineffable qualities of Mary. She, as well as ourselves, is indebted to him for all she possesses or ever did possess: and our confidence in her intercession is excited by nothing more than by the wonders which he has vouchsafed to work by her.

It must not, however, be supposed that our salvation will be effected by merely placing ourselves under the protection of Mary, and soliciting her intercession. Far otherwise: salvation depends on observance of the whole law of God. The man who continues to love the world, who is a slave to sensual pleasures, who does not resist the impetuosity of his criminal passions, will not be benefited by his applications to Mary. She turns away from him: she considers him as the enemy of her Son; she detests the confidence which he places in her, as being injurious to the honour and glory of the

Deity. She is ready, indeed, to assist by her mediation those sinners who are sincerely desirous of returning from the ways of error; but she solicits that punishment should be inflicted on those who go on in sin upon the presumption that her mediation will secure them from the effects of the justice of God.

Ah! if Jesus Christ acknowledges those only for his mother and his brethren, who do the will of his Heavenly Father, can it be supposed that Mary will reckon among the number of her clients the transgressors of this holy will, and the enemies of the doctrine and cross of her Son? Were she to act in this manner, she would be the protectress and encourager of the very passions which her Son came to resist and subdue: her power would tend to destroy the work of the gospel: her interference would be a direct attempt to open a way to Heaven very different from that which was traced out by her Redeemer. No, my beloved; Mary is considered by the Church as the firm support of our weakness, but not the encourager of our passions; as a sure resource in the midst of dangers, but not the protectress of our crimes. Those only are her clients who adhere to her Son; and the only way of insuring to ourselves her mediation and assistance is to show forth in our lives that piety, that innocence, that charity, and those other virtues which made her so acceptable in the sight of her great Creator.

3. Another humiliation of Mary during her mortal life was the confusion which must have necessarily attended the discovery of her pregnancy by Joseph. This trial she bore in silence: she did not attempt to vindicate herself: she did not disclose the great mystery which had been wrought in her. She bowed submissively to the will of God; she resigned her reputation and her whole self entirely into his hands, and joyfully consented to endure the humiliation and shame, till he in his wisdom should vouchsafe to manifest this mystery to the world.

The trial undoubtedly was severe, and the reward was proportioned to her patience in enduring it. No sooner had death loosed the bands of her mortality, than she was glorified by the veneration and homage of mankind. All nations and all people have heard the wonders which God had wrought in her. Wheresoever the glory of Jesus has penetrated, and formed a congregation of true believers, there is she likewise honoured and praised. She was no sooner departed from the earth, than apostolic men addressed their supplications to her and entreated her mediation. Those happy times were the first that witnessed the respect and veneration of the faithful

for Mary. The honours that were then paid to this Queen of Heaven must have been great and solemn; for it is recorded that some ignorant and superstitious Christians carried their veneration even to an excess, and fell into idolatry; they offered sacrifice to her, and worshipped her with that worship which was due only to the Deity.

In proportion as the Christian faith was propagated, the devotion to Mary was extended over the earth. After the peace of the Church was established by the Christian emperors, the respect and homage paid to Mary became more solemn and universal in proportion as the faithful were enabled to celebrate the holy mysteries with greater magnificence and pomp. In vain did a few restless and haughty spirits pretend to dispute her title of Mother of God. Their blasphemies contributed only to rouse the piety of the faithful; in every place altars and temples were consecrated under her protection and name, to the glory of her Son: councils were assembled, in order to defend her honour and dignity against the attacks of these innovators, and by their solemn decisions to proclaim to succeeding generations the respect and veneration which they and their forefathers entertained for this purest of all creatures. Thus the only effect produced by the temporary propagation of this erroneous opinion (and it is the common fate of all opinions that are erroneous,) was the establishment of the truth in its fullest lustre.

Whole cities, and even empires, placed themselves under her powerful protection; separate communities of each sex were formed in her name, and under her patronage were illustrious for their piety and fidelity to the great Author of their existence. This kingdom, before it was separated from the centre of unity, and delivered up to the horrors of religious animosity and dissension, was distinguished for its respect and veneration for this illustrious Virgin. Our kings considered her, under her Son, as the protectress of their states; our most holy prelates were the most zealous promoters of her glory, and most earnestly encouraged the faithful to solicit her intercession and assistance before the throne of grace. This they did, and this they were authorised to do by the examples of those apostolic men who were commissioned and sent by the holy Pope Gregory to establish in this island the faith of Jesus on the ruins of superstition and idolatry.

The ancient and universal faith, the faith of Christ and his apostles, is no longer the established faith of this nation; error and dissension have taken its place. But the mercies of the Lord are not wholly withdrawn; a small number continue to exist in the land who still adhere to to the universal

faith of all ages, and maintain the honour and dignity of her who is honoured by the whole Court of Heaven. Let us, therefore, be more fervent in our applications to Mary, in proportion as her patronage is disregarded and despised by those around us. Our devotion, however, must be regulated according to the maxims of faith. We have only one supreme Mediator, who is our Lord Jesus Christ; he mediates for us by his blood, and claims, as it were, by right, graces and blessings from his Father on account of his own merits. Mary is not a mediator of this description; as a being wholly dependent on God, she can claim nothing by virtue of her own right from the great Giver of all good gifts. Her mediation is nothing more than intercession, or uniting her prayers with ours, and offering them conjointly to her Divine Son, the great Mediator between God and his creatures. This intercession, however, is powerful; and the more earnestly we petition for it, the more confidently we may expect to receive from the hand of God the blessings which are requisite for the redress of our spiritual necessities. But we must not forget that it is in vain to solicit the intercession of Mary, unless we endeavour to extirpate our vicious inclinations, and to live in conformity with the precepts of the gospel.

Thus was the death of Mary glorious and triumphant; and such, whenever it pleases God to take him to his rest, will be the death of the just man. It is not easy to reflect on this without being struck with the astonishing contrast which is presented to us in the deplorable death of the sinner. Ah! my beloved friends, death puts a final period to the glory of the man who forgets God during the days of health and vigour. The tyrant with an irresistible grasp seizes on all that belonged to him; he suffers him to enjoy no longer any of those things that appeared great and good in the eyes of men; and he throws him unprotected and helpless into the hands of a terrible God. The circle of friends and relatives, in the midst of which he lived as if he had been immortal, can afford him no assistance. Like men who from the cliffs behold a fellow mortal vainly struggling against the waves, and at length sinking into the bosom of the unrelenting deep, they can do no more than utter forth their unavailing lamentations, and supplicate Heaven for his deliverance. He himself fights the battle of death alone; he can receive no succours from any created being; and his God he has neglected and insulted.

Oh, what a state is this! The past appears like a vapour which glittered for a moment and disappeared; the future,

like an unfathomable abyss into which he is about to plunge, dreadfully uncertain as to his final lot. The world, which he had hitherto loved as something real and substantial, proves to be nothing but smoke; eternity, which he had disregarded as unworthy of his serious consideration, proves to be real and substantial. He is enlightened, but his heart is not changed. He is sorrowful, but he is not repentant. His body is delivered up a prey to the vilest insects; his career of glory is ended; his name is forgotten; but his soul lives for ever, separated from her God and consigned to that place of darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But to the just man death appears in the same light as it has always done. The tyrant deprives him of nothing that he values. No; he is disengaged in affection from the world, and all its vanities and follies; he is full of good works; he is ripe for Heaven. He shuts his eyes without regret to all terrestrial things; he flies into the bosom of God, from whence he came, and where he had always dwelt in desire, and he enters with peace and joy into a happy eternity.

LXV.—ALL SAINTS.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF THE JUST IN THIS LIFE.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."—*Matt.*, v, 5.

Were I to address you in the language of the world, I should say: Blessed are they that rejoice and are glad; blessed are they that are strangers to affliction and mourning; blessed are they that live in the midst of prosperity, health, and tranquillity, and possess all that their hearts can desire. This would be my language, because this is the language of the world.

But as a minister of the Most High, as a messenger of truth, it is my duty to address you in words of a far different import; it is my duty to expose to view the fallacious maxims of the world, and to describe with justness and sincerity the means of attaining to that state of happiness which is desired and sought after by every individual of the human race.

The authority on which I shall found my arguments will not be the judgment of the world, but the unerring testimony of truth itself; that authority which declares in the words of my text, that they who mourn are blessed, because they shall be comforted. The relation which subsists between the

happiness of man in the present stage of his existence, and that which is attainable in a future world, is of the closest kind. They are nearly similar. I know that this is not a maxim which is at all suited to the habits and opinions of the world; but, contrary to the world's opinion and its settled practice, I contend that they are, in a manner, indentified. Both are founded in the same principles, and are dependent upon the same cause: and whatever our enjoyment may be at present, and however gratifying it may be our natural inclinations, if it does not perfectly correspond with the happiness we all hope for in the world to come, it ought rather to be looked upon as a delusion than as a taste of real happiness. No reflection that can occupy your attention can be more appropriate on a day when we are invited by the Church to celebrate the memory of our brethren who are gone before us with the sign of faith, and are admitted into the mansions of eternal bliss: none, I believe, which can be better calculated to encourage you to walk in the same paths of holiness and virtue in which they walked.

For this reason, I shall enter into an explanation of the great affinity which subsisted between the happiness the saints enjoyed on earth and the happiness they now enjoy in Heaven, and shall take occasion from this circumstance to show that their former happiness on earth was far superior to any which the votaries of pleasure can possibly promise themselves in the delusive appearance of worldly happiness.

In the first place, the saints were happy on earth, because, being raised by faith above the things of this world, they were not to be affected by those disquietudes and cares which rob the worldling of his peace: and secondly, they were happy, because the superior consolations of Heaven induced them to resist the impetuosity of the passions, and to renounce those unworthy gratifications in which the worldling seeks for happiness, but which in reality are the chief source of all his woe.

1. The unhappiness of people in the world is chiefly owing to their misconceptions respecting the real nature of what are called the blessings and the evils of this life. The just are more enlightened: they are the children of light: they see the things of this world in their true colours, naked and undisguised. This heavenly wisdom enables them to submit to labours and sufferings with cheerful patience, and to discover abundant motives for consolation in the very source from whence the sorrows of worldlings are derived.

In order that you may be convinced of the truth of an assertion which is so honourable to the cause of virtue and

holiness, nothing more will be required than to show the different effects which the consideration of the past, the view of present things, and the prospect of the future, produce in the minds of the virtuous and of the dissolute.

In the first place, the effect which the consideration of the past produces in the minds of the dissolute is painful in the extreme. There is no one so abandoned, so absorbed in the pleasures of the world, as not to be constrained to reflect, from time to time, on the years that he has devoted to vanity and intemperance. In the hours of silent retirement every sinner is roused from his lethargy by the terrific voice of conscience: the days which he has misspent, and which seemed to have been buried for ever in the deep abyss of oblivion, present themselves before him, and the whole catalogue of his crimes collected into one point of view stares him in the face. Then it is that he beholds the graces that he has abused, the inspirations which he has neglected, the profanations which he has committed, and the multiplied and shameful excesses which he has indulged in, through every stage of his life. The scene is too frightful to look steadily upon: he turns away from it with horror: he envies the condition of the brute beast, because its enjoyments are not disturbed by reflection—the fatal disturber of his repose: and he hurries again into fresh excesses in order to divest himself of thought, and to fly away, as it were, from himself.

But it is not so with the just man. The time that is past presents no unpleasant objects to his view; or rather, the sweet occupation of his mind is to meditate on the ancient mercies of the Lord, and to trace the ways by which he brought him to the knowledge of this holy law. The recollection even of his past disloyalties does not disturb the serenity of his soul; the tears which it draws from his eyes, are not tears of melancholy sadness, they are tears of interior joy and love, and increase his confidence in him who has been the salvation of his countenance, and his God.

Secondly, the view of present things, or of the figure of this world, contributes in an equal degree to produce the same effects as the recollection of the past. My remarks on this part of my subject will convince you that happiness in this life essentially depends on the practice of virtue; and that the same world which excites the passions of its admirers, and consequently involves them in all the perplexities and cares with which the gratification of the passions is attended, is the most pleasing and the most consolatory exercise of the faith of the just.

The world, even in its gayest circles, is a state of continual

servitude. Its followers cannot live for themselves; its laws must be obeyed, and obeyed with the minutest precision; its happiness is tasted by those only who can hug their chains, and are in love with their bondage. The world is a constant succession of events which by turns excite in the minds of its votaries the most violent and corroding passions—hatreds, envies, alarms, apprehensions, jealousies, mortifications, and disappointments. The world is a land of malediction, where even pleasure is armed with a sting, and joy is mixed up with bitterness and sorrow. The world is a place where hope, the consoling soother of the troubled mind, is the cause of uneasiness and solicitude; and where the want of hope is the summit of wretchedness and despair: where the objects that are pleasing to-day are not pleasing to-morrow, and where disgust and irksomeness are the least intolerable evils that are endured.

This is the world, not in any of its obscure recesses, where few of its pleasures are seen and enjoyed, but it is the world in its splendour, such as it is seen and enjoyed by the highest ranks of society; it is the world decked out in all the charms which health, prosperity, riches, and pleasures can throw around it. The description is not an imaginary one; it is drawn from truth; and it will be acknowledged to be just by all who have been at any time its followers.

And yet this is the world in which sinners place their happiness! This is the land which they call their beloved country, and in which they would willingly fix their abode for ever! This is the world which they prefer to the world to come, and to all the great and glorious promises of the gospel! Ah! how just is it that such inconceivable folly should meet with nothing but unhappiness and disappointment.

The just man, on the other hand, is elevated far above this world, and consequently is far removed from the influence of its inconstancy and capriciousness. He is convinced that there is nothing durable on earth; that riches, and pleasures, and health, are blessings which we may enjoy to-day, and be deprived of to-morrow; that honours and reputation are not worthy of his ambition, since they are not the criterion of merit, but are possessed more frequently by the undeserving than by the truly good and virtuous. He fixes his eyes on God alone, and in submitting himself to the decrees of his Providence, he enjoys a peace and serenity of mind which is never enjoyed by the admirer of the world. He is happy in the midst of pains and sufferings, as well as in ease and comfort; he is happy in adversity as well as in prosperity; he is

happy in poverty, as well as in opulence; he receives evil things from the hands of the Almighty with the same readiness as he receives good things; in a word, he is as happy under every occurrence of life as it is possible for human nature to be in this place of pilgrimage at a distance from God.

These, my beloved, are the delights of virtue; this is the superiority which is possessed by the man of piety over the lovers of the mammon of this perishable world. But when he looks forward to a future state, what are his sensations? Ah! his soul is on fire; he is impatient to obtain possession of the object of his hope; he longs for that happy moment when he shall be united to the Church above, when he shall be associated with the inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and incorporated with the elect of God in that blessed abode where charity alone is their law, and eternity the measure of their felicity.

These consolations—the only consolations that are not mingled with bitterness and sorrow—are exclusively the property of the just man; the sinner is a stranger to them; when *he* looks forward to futurity, he is seized with terror and dismay. The light of faith, which spreads joy and gladness over the soul of the pious Christian, becomes an instrument of the justice of God on the sinner; it destroys every pleasure, and opens an inexhaustible source of anxiety and uneasiness. In vain does he endeavour to banish the thought from his mind. He is constrained to fix his eyes on the unfathomable abyss, and to behold the arm of the Almighty uplifted ready to fall upon him, and to consign him for ever to that place of inexpressible torments.

What a state is this which the sinner chooses for himself! How erroneous are his ideas concerning the nature of true happiness! How dearly does he purchase eternal torments! He seeks for ease and enjoyment in this life, but the path of the world and of the passions, in which he expects to find it, is more thorny than the path of the gospel; he refuses to suffer for the kingdom of Heaven at the same that he plainly perceives that what he is accustomed to endure for the kingdom of hell is a great deal more than would be sufficient to purchase Heaven.

Oh! what a treasure do they lose who part with their innocence! They deprive themselves of the consolations of religion, which diffuse joy over the souls of the just; and, in addition to this, they deprive themselves of the blessings of grace, without which it is impossible to enjoy any true pleasure on earth.

2. The blessings which are conferred by grace are manifold; the first of which is an unalterable serenity of mind. The principles of equity, modesty, and rectitude, were implanted in our nature; we were born, says the apostle, with the law written on our heart. If virtue be not the primary object of our ambition, we are convinced at least that virtue is our primary duty. In vain does corrupt nature insinuate that the depraved inclinations which we experience within ourselves, may be followed without a crime, and that our only law is the law of the members. There is an impartial judge beyond the reach of bribery and corruption in the interior of our souls who always declares in favour of virtue, and opposes the demands of self-love; who importunately reminds us of the duty we owe to God, even when we are in the pursuit of our favourite passions, and who makes us wretched even in the midst of splendour and opulence.

Thus it is with the sinner. He is compelled to be his own accuser, and to pass sentence of condemnation on himself. He is tormented by incessant terrors and alarms. He is unhappy because he cannot conquer his disorderly passions, and he is yet more unhappy because he cannot close his ears to the cries of conscience.

But the just man is a stranger to anxiety and remorse. The trials and afflictions to which he is subjected are light and transient; they pass like a cloud over his soul; they make no impression on it. An unalterable peace reigns in his interior, and within him is to be found that placid tranquillity, that simplicity of heart, that lively confidence, that calm resignation which give him a foretaste of that inexpressible felicity which awaits him in the world to come.

The second blessing which is conferred by grace is love, even that love which causes the law of the Lord to appear amiable and charming, and the yoke of the Lord easy and light. Animated by this love, the pious Christian experiences neither difficulty nor pain in fulfilling the most arduous precepts of the gospel; all is easy; all is pleasing; it is with joy that he pardons injuries, with confidence that he suffers corporal afflictions, with pleasure that he mortifies himself, with inward satisfaction that he renounces the vanities of the world, with delight that he applies to prayer, and with complacency that he performs his duties. The more his love is increased, the lighter is the yoke; the more he loves, the more perfect is his happiness.

The sinner, on the other hand, fixes his affections on the world; and the effects which this love produces are of a contrary tendency. The more he loves the world the less satis-

faction he enjoys; because, the more his love is increased, the more turbulent are his passions, the more eager are his desires, and the more painful is his solicitude and anxiety. His love is the source from whence all his unhappiness flows; because the more he loves the world, the more ardent he is in the pursuit of pleasure; and finding no real satisfaction in any thing that the world possesses, the more is his disgust, the more is his weariness and disappointment increased.

I am not exaggerating the unhappiness of worldlings, in order to throw a brighter lustre on the charms of virtue. You yourselves may ascertain the truth of my statement. Go up to those men who seem to be the elect of this world, who have every thing at their command, and you will behold that content and happiness never entered their dwelling; look into their interior at a time when calm retirement obliges them to reflect, and you will see that the stings of remorse inflict the most painful wounds in their soul: ask them what are their sentiments, and they will tell you that the splendour of the world glitters only at a distance, and that the most happy man in this life is a virtuous man.

If there be any of the present auditory who seek their happiness in this world, I appeal to them whether this is not the truth? Have you ever attained to the summit of your wishes? Has there been a time when you could say that your happiness was complete? In certain moments of jollity and excess you may perhaps have exclaimed: "It is good for us to be here:" but how long did it continue? Ah! the illusion speedily vanished, and your former cares and disquietudes resumed their station. At the moment I am speaking to you can you say that you are tranquil and happy? Are you under no apprehensions? Would you consent to live and die in the state in which you now are? Are you satisfied with the world? Are you unfaithful to the Author of your existence without remorse?

No: my brethren, although the sinner were to hide himself in the bottom of the sea, says the prophet, the Lord will command the serpent of anxiety and remorse, and it shall bite him in that dark abode (*Amos*, ix, 3); there shall be no peace for the wicked.

Is it not true, likewise, that on those occasions when you were animated by devotion, when you tasted the sweets of Heaven at the banquet of our Lord—is it not true that the pleasure you then experienced was satisfactory—did it not fill the vast capacity of your souls? Were you not desirous of a continuance of the same happy transports?

Oh! how incomprehensible are the ways of man! He pants after happiness during his abode in this life, and he will not walk in the path that leads to it. He is actuated by self-love, and he incessantly opposes his own interests. He beholds the source from whence all his sufferings proceed, and he will not renounce it. He is enamoured of virtue, and he will not embrace it. How severely will he condemn his folly and madness hereafter, when he shall be summoned before the tribunal of an offended God, to render an account of his works! He will not say: "Alas! my days of gladness are over: the world in which I enjoyed so much pleasure and delight is no more: my happiness is at an end, and my sufferings are about to commence." This will not be his language: words of a far different import, according to the testimony of the Spirit of God, will proceed from his lips: "I wearied myself," he will say, "in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord I have not known. What hath pride profited me: or what hath the boasting of riches brought me? All these things are passed away like a shadow. (*Wisd.*, v.) I might have been numbered among the children of God, but I preferred darkness before light, and have purchased to myself sorrow that will never end."

If, therefore, it be your desire to enjoy peace and happiness on earth, embrace a life of piety. Innocence is the source of true pleasure. Be not deceived by outward appearances. The external delights of the worldling are embittered by the most painful anguish of mind; and the external mourning of the just man is sweetened by the most enlivening interior consolations. The ark of Israel in the desert was covered with skins, and exhibited a mean and uncouth appearance. In the same manner the man of piety not unfrequently appears despicable in the eyes of the world; but were you to look into his interior, you would see that it was covered, like the ark, with the purest gold; you would perceive that it was filled with the glory of the Lord; you would be ravished with the sweetness of the perfumes of prayer, which ascend constantly from the inflamed altar of his heart; you would admire the silence, the peace, the grandeur, that reign there undisturbed; you would be convinced that the Lord had chosen it for his abode, and that it was his delight to dwell therein.

May the description I have given induce you to enter seriously the ways of virtue. You have hitherto enjoyed existence only in part. Your God invites you to return to him. Attend to his gracious calls: banish wickedness from your hearts, and you will remove the cause of all your woe;

you will experience transports of delight which you never experienced before; and these transports will be only a foretaste of that felicity which is prepared for you in the regions of never-ending bliss.

THE END.

Dublin: Printed by J. Moore, 2, Crampton-quay.

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MASSILLION, JOHN.B.
AUTHOR

Sermons for Sundays etc.
TITLE

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